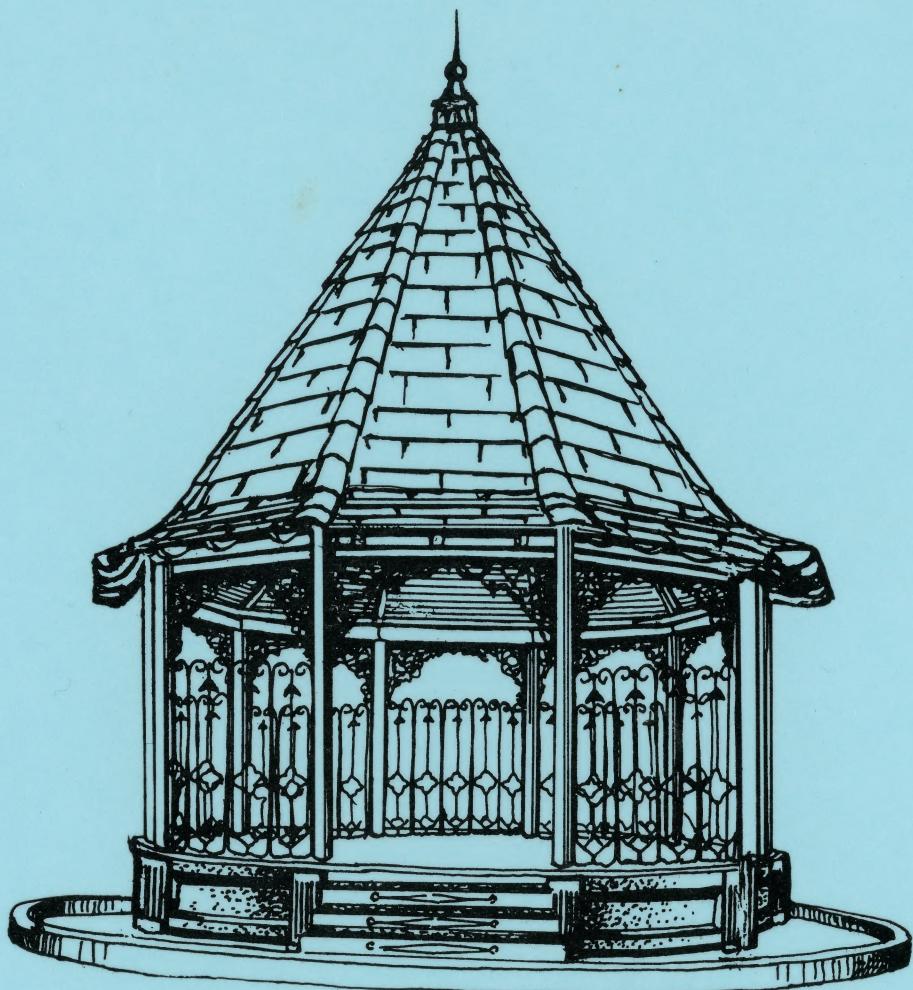


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HISTORY OF



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A
CHRONICLE
OF THE
VILLAGE OF THREE RIVERS

by

Jane E. Golas

1990

No man is fit to be entrusted with
the control of the Present, who is
Ignorant of the Past, and no People,
who are indifferent to their Past,
need hope to make their Future great.

Unknown



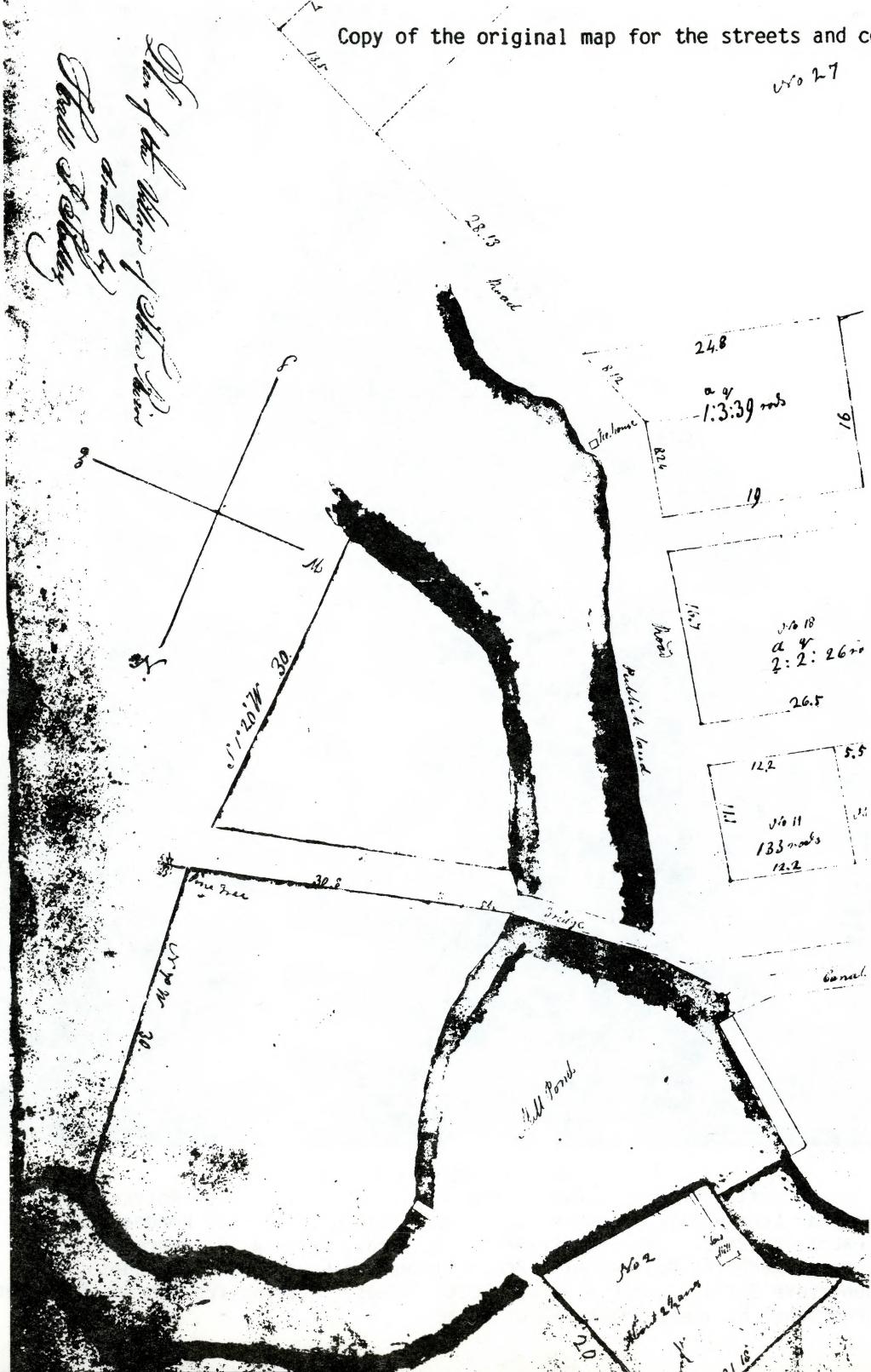
Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce 1990

Top row left to right: Edward Zerdecki, Louis Luzi, George Motyka, Chester Motyka, Leon Wlodyka, Howard Case, Charles Reagan, Richard Rondeau, Peter Chabot, V. Pres., Stanley Strzemienski, Barney Grzwnya, Theodore Bonnayer, Dominick Machnik, Don Ferrell, Pres., Josephine Fountaine, Jane Chase, Genevieve Bates, Joseph Kszepka, Secty./Treas. Missing from photo: E. Robert Graveline, Mitchell Dobek, Asst. Treas.

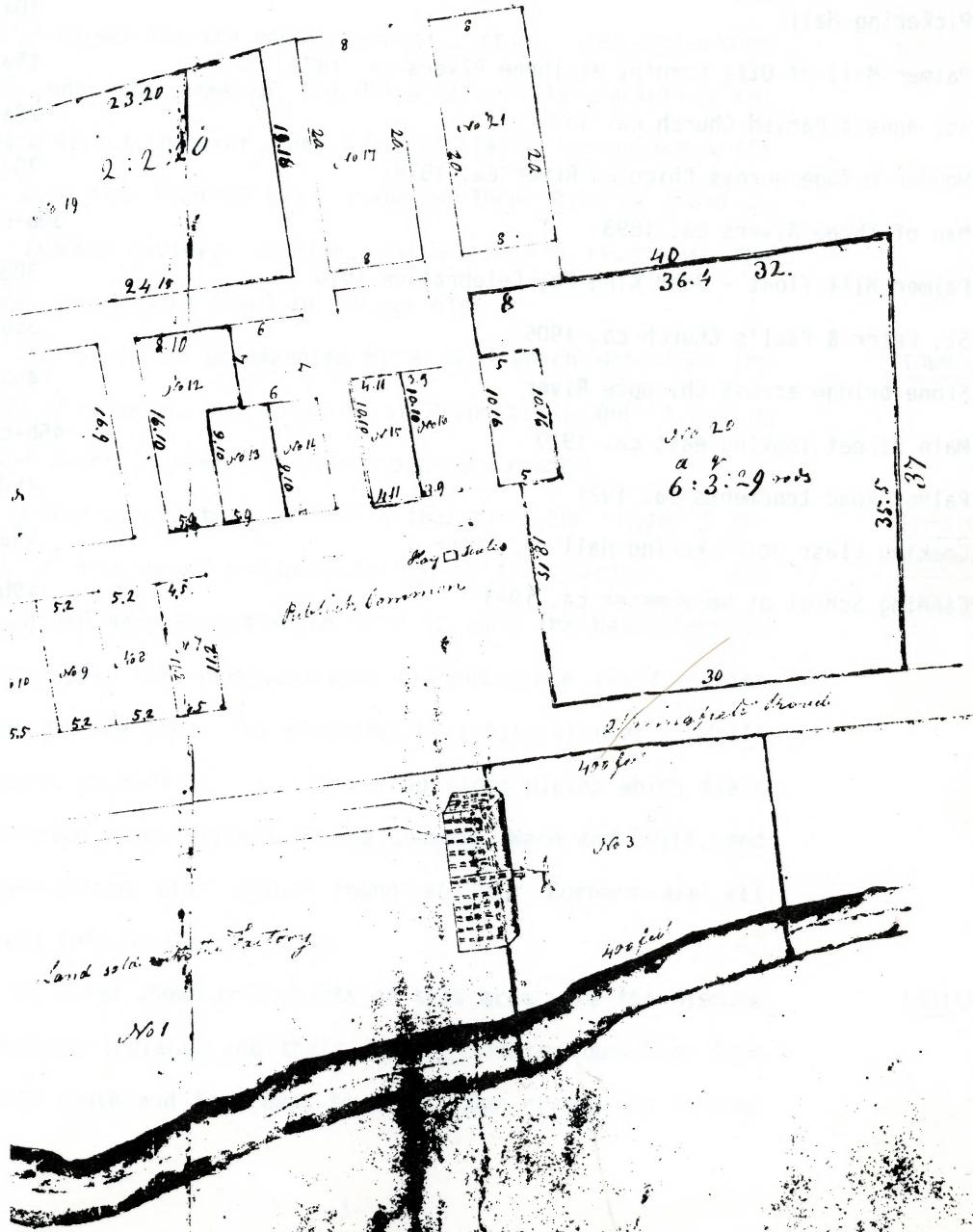
Copy of the original map for the streets and common

vvo 27

The first volume of the New
and Complete
School Statuary



in the Village of Three Rivers drawn by Hall J. Kelley ca. 1829



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CHAPTER I

Naming the Village

The history of Three Rivers began on January 21, 1826 when corporators of a new manufacturing company were granted the lawful right by the Legislature to build a mill in the Town of Palmer for the manufacture of cotton, linen and woolen goods under the name of the Three Rivers Manufacturing Co. Village status, however, was not officially recognized until 1829 when "The Plan of the Village of Three Rivers", drawn by Hall Jackson Kelley, Engineer, was placed on record at the Hampden Registry of Deeds in Springfield.

The "Plan" is accompanied by a deed which describes the layout of Streets, the location of Properties, and "A Public Square" which is always to remain open and common.

Historically, this village situated in the rugged highlands of the upper Chicopee Valley at the junction of the Quaboag and Ware Rivers which join to form the headwaters of the Chicopee, had undergone many changes since its formation during the ice age. The elongated oval hill of glacial drift now known as Baptist Hill, the broad flood plains which flank the winding river valleys of the Quaboag, Ware and Swift, and the designated pine plains found at Four Corners are all remnants left by the ice flows.

The first known inhabitants of this area were the Nipmuck and Quaboag Indians, and their trails crossed our Town from north to south and from east to west. Our rivers and streams

NAMING THE VILLAGE

TOWN COMMON

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF LAND AREA

INDIANS

were abundant with fish, and the wooded areas harbored many deer and other game animals.

Although Palmer was never used as a permanent campsite, as was Brimfield or Wilbraham, there is much evidence, however, that seasonal camping frequently occurred here.

INDIAN TRAILS

The Village of Three Rivers was touched by two of the trails. The first crossing of the Ware River about 220 yards north of the Main St. bridge. The second, although not actually in the village, for it crossed the Swift River north of the junction with the Ware River, thereby connecting Bondsville with Belchertown was, however, the main trail access to the fishing weir that lays in the Ware riverbed just below the Swift and Ware River junction.

CRYSTAL LAKE

It appears that Crystal Lake area was a "Manor Place" so called, where large clans of Indians gathered in season, partly for recreation and partly for making ready provisions for the coming winter. About 1,000 ft. downstream from the above mentioned second trail crossing, the Indians had built a Menamesick or fishing weir. Menamesick or Wenamesick is an Indian word tht means "great fishing basket".

FISHING WEIR

This weir, properly pronounced WARE, thus the name of the river, was set chiefly for catching salmon and shad. The Menamesick consisted of stonewalls built from opposite sides of the riverbank so as to form a "V" that points downstream. The walls did not meet in the center of the stream but stopped short leaving a narrow opening at its point. Just beyond the

narrow opening a circle of stones were used to anchor a large wooden cage or basket made from saplings fastened into hoops by strips of tough bark.

In spring, when the water was high, the fish would swim upstream into the headwater where they would deposit their spawn. By mid-summer they would make a return trip back to the ocean from which they came. By this time the water level of the river would be much lower and the stonewalls would be just below the water's surface. This would be the time the fishing basket was installed. The fish like any other living creature, often took the path of least resistance, letting themselves be carried along by the current. This path, for the most part, followed the stonewall right into the basket, trapping the fish, thus making them easy prey for the Indian.

In 1614, Capt. John Smith left Jamestown, Virginia to explore the New England coastline. He touched shore at many points and made contact with several Indian tribesmen. Unknowingly some of his crew carried the Smallpox virus which was transferred to the Indian. Having no immunity to such a virulent disease, the redmen suffered a tremendous loss of life so much so that by the time the Pilgrims came in 1620, there were only about 300 Indians left in what is now the State of Massachusetts.

This therefore, is the reason that there was little or no activity at the former Manor Place summer campsites so called. In fact by the time the first white settlers infiltrated into

SMALL POX
EPIDEMIC

THE DARK
CORNER

the village of Three Rivers, they were met with a jungle-like growth. The growth was so intense that the area was known as "The Dark Corner".

JOHN SHEARER

Reportedly the first white settler of the village was that of John Shearer who came with his bride ca. 1730, and occupied a homesite on what is now Palmer Road.

BRIMFIELD
ANNEX

At that time all the land west of the Quaboag and south of the Chicopee Rivers was a part of the Brimfield Annex. On April 24, 1760, however, the following legislature was passed and that area was united with the Town of Palmer:

ANNEXED TO
PALMER

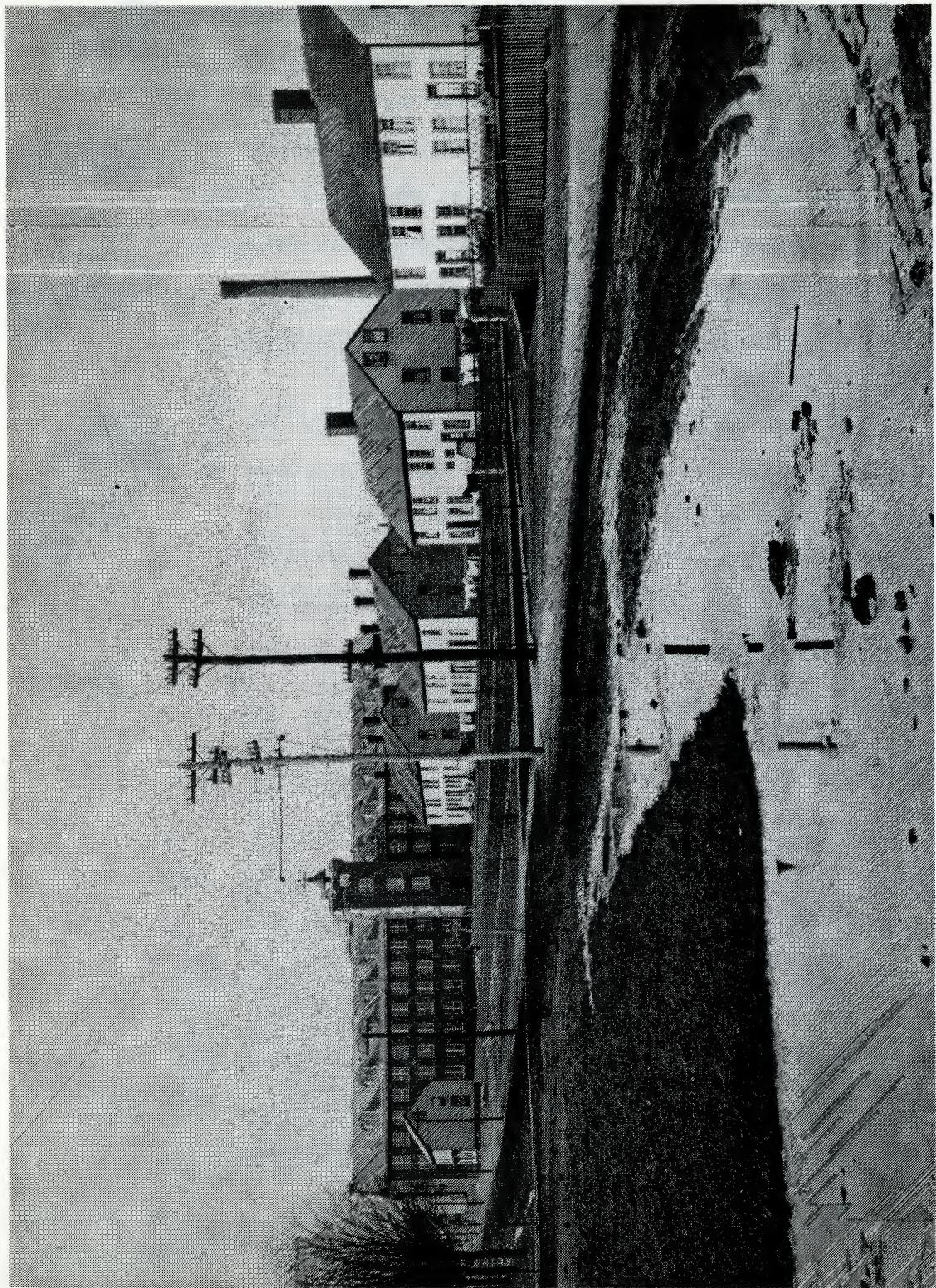
"Resolved and ordered that the inhabitants, together with all the land lying in the Town of Brimfield north of the Country Road from Boston to Springfield (Rt. 20), be and hereby are set off to the District of Palmer by the following bounds viz: beginning at the bank of the Chicopee River (Quaboag), on the northside of said Country Road (Rt. 20) by the foot of Scotts Bridge (wiremill), so called, thence following said road and bounding south thereon to the Springfield line (Wilbraham), then turning north in said line to said river (Chicopee), then turning up said river bounding northerly (Chicopee), and easterly (Quaboag), thereon to the bridge aforesaid - and made part and parcel of said District, there to do duly and receive privilege."

Gradually, as time passed, other settlers came and occupied the village lands. James McElwain settled on the Pine Plains near where Pathfinder is now; Samuel Nevins at the junction of Bourne and Pleasant Streets; Robert Dunlap on the northside of the Chicopee on Barker Street; while Hugh Moor chose the southside of Springfield Street, near the bottom of the river's fall. Timothy McElwain chose upper North Street, near where the Swift and Ware Rivers meet, while Gideon Graves settled on Baptist Hill on what is now Burlingame Road.

All of these men were farmers who were granted from 100 to 300 acres by the General Court in 1732. In 1775 Hugh Moor expanded his vocation by erecting a saw and grist mill on the Chicopee River thus becoming the village's first industrialist. In 1790 Gideon Graves bought the Moor Mill and continued its operation until 1825 when it became a part of the Three Rivers' Manufacturing Co. complex.

MORE
SETTLERS

SAW AND
GRIST MILL



Mill houses on the "Island" built ca. 1835

CHAPTER II

Formation of the Mill

In the spring of 1825 a group of Boston businessmen eager to become involved in the wave of industrial revolution that was sweeping the country and having learned of the potential site for a Manufacturing Village on the privilege of the Chicopee River, dispatched an agent to the Town of Palmer for the purpose of buying land.

Within 12 months all necessary land had been purchased, including a nine foot high dam that lay in the Chicopee River just below the three river junctions, and in the late winter of 1826 construction began on the large textile mill and its power canal.

It is unfortunate that the engineer and contractor hired to build the mill did not understand the basic principles of building a functional canal as well. The end result was a very inefficient flow of water that caused several delays in production. The Three Rivers Manufacturing Co. had no choice but to rebuild the canal for the cost of production had become prohibitive. Therefore in 1828, the corporators voted to hire Hall Jackson Kelley, Civil Engineer, of Boston to redesign the canal and supervise its construction.

Mr. Kelley's work proved to be successful and production was able to be resumed the following spring. However, by this time the company found itself heavily in debt. Try as they would they were unable to make up for their losses. Mortgages and other cost production debts seemed to pile one upon the

FORMATION OF A
MILL VILLAGE

CONSTRUCTION
OF THE FIRST
MILL

REBUILT CANAL

PRODUCTION
RESUMED

other so that by 1831 all hope of salvation was gone and foreclosure was its only fate.

FEDERAL CENSUS

1830

The villagers were becoming very anxious about the mill's situation for according to the Federal Census of 1830, the population of the Town of Palmer had only risen 428 since 1790 which was slightly more than ten persons per year. Of this number nearly half were associated with the Three Rivers Manufacturing Co. It was with great relief, therefore, when they learned that a new corporation headed by John S. Wright, Luther Parks and Thomas Lord would be formed under the name of "The Palmer Company" and that the employees were to continue on with their jobs.

THE PALMER CO.

October 7, 1831 the Three Rivers Manufacturing Co. signed off all its rights, buildings and privilege to The Palmer Co., however, three of the corporators who owned mortgages in their own right chose not to sell to the new company. Instead these men, Octavious Pickering, Edmund Monroe and Hall J. Kelley would continue to reinvest their talents for the betterment of the village community for many years to come.

The Palmer Co. under the guidance of a new agent, Joseph Brown, introduced new and better methods of manufacturing; one such change was that of a new type of spindle and loom which could accomodate short staple cotton, thus saving a considerable amount of money over the long fiber method.

INVENTORY

1834

The Palmer Co. continued its steady growth and by 1834 the company holdings which included the mill, the canal, a

blacksmith shop, and aquaduct, a saw and grist mill, a store, a boarding house, three tenement houses and a working farm were feeling the strain of overcrowding, for with the expanded growth had come an expanded workforce.

Housing accommodations, which seemed to be the most urgent need, was addressed by the company in 1835 when five large houses were built on the "Island" so called, so as to provide twenty-four tenements of three to five rooms each.

The "Island" was a man-made plot of land created when the power canal was excavated. The canal began at the bank of the Chicopee River near where the rivers junctioned and terminated down river just beyond the factory building site.

In 1949, the Tampax Corp. filled in the canal in order to make room for the company's cafeteria. In so doing, "The Island" was eliminated and the land was returned to its original state.

The tenement houses, on the other hand, were removed in 1921. Four of them were sold for \$50.00 each and dismantled by the new owners. One of the Island houses was purchased by William Roman who would use the lumber from his dismantled house to build No. 10 Palmer Road. The fifth tenement was removed from the land behind what is now Tenczar's Market, and has been relocated on Palmer Road, and is now the first in the row of company houses.

In 1835 the hourly wage in the Mill was 6 cents and payday was every three months. It is no wonder the Company

THE "ISLAND"
HOUSES

THE ISLAND

PALMER ROAD

PAY WAGES

furnished so many necessities such as housing and the company store, where charge accounts were the rule rather than the exception.

Later as wages were increased and pay schedules were revised to a weekly period, the dependence upon the company store gradually declined and would eventually be replaced by private enterprise.

COMPANY STORE

The company store, so called, was located on Front Street and as time passed it changed from Company to private operation with the last tenant being James Wilson. Then in 1912, according to an article in the Palmer Journal dated September 13, "The building on Front Street, occupied by James Wilson is being moved back to a new foundation on High Street. It will be converted to tenements by the Palmer Mill Co." In 1986 this building was ravaged by fire and has since been torn down.

Up until the 1830's, the only church meetinghouse within the Town of Palmer was that of the Congregational Society located at Palmer Center; and not until the erection of the textile mill in the village of Three Rivers was there really any one area that held a relatively high concentration of inhabitants.

The presence of the Palmer Mill brought about change by shifting the population balance of the town, thus increasing the number of residences in the village to a simple majority.

By the mid 1830's, the Palmer Co. was in full production

and was providing a profitable return to the investors. Apparently encouraged by this flow of profit, two of the corporators of the Palmer Co.; J. S. Wright and Luther Parks joined with a third, Israel Thorndike, and in 1837 formed a second textile corporation to be built on the privilege of the Ware River at the elbow and to be named The Thorndike Co. The following year, 1838, these same three corporators would form a third textile corporation on the Swift River naming it the Munroe Co.

Both of these new textile mills were to use the expertise of the same Joseph Brown who had so successfully directed the operation and production of the Palmer Co.

In 1845 the Munroe Co. was sold to the newly formed Boston Duck Co. of whom J. S. Wright was a corporator.

The 1841 Gazeteer, (a geographical dictionary) describes the Village of Three Rivers as:

"being on the Chicopee River at the western extremity of the town nearly three miles from the center; this is a factory village consisting of about 20 dwelling houses and a Baptist Church."

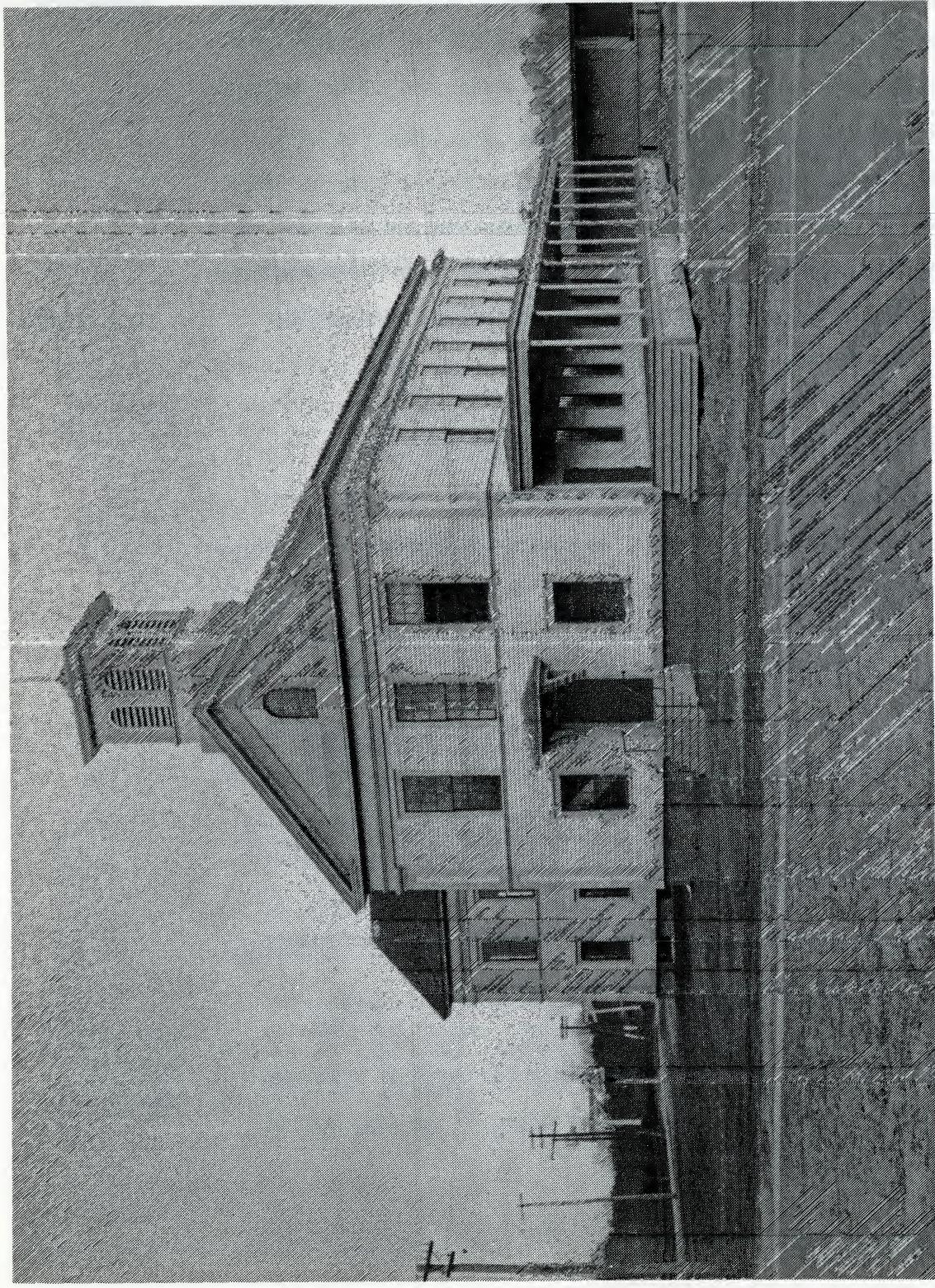
Not exactly a boom town one might say but a great improvement over its "Dark Corner" status.

As a matter of fact, the village's status had grown to the point that in 1837 it was granted the right of reserving a spot of land within the village proper to be used as the Three Rivers/Thorndike Cemetery.

THORNDIKE CO.

MUNROE CO.

THREE RIVERS/
THORNDIKE
CEMETERY



Pickering Hall corner of Bridge and Main Streets

CHAPTER III

The Refining of the Village

As early as 1819 a few families in the village had begun holding religious meetings with neighboring Baptist ministers.

BAPTIST
CHURCH

But because their members were so few, no steps were taken to organize into a church society until 1825 when they joined in allegiance with a group from Belchertown and formed the "Belchertown and Palmer Baptist Church". Their meetings were held in South Belchertown in a meetinghouse occupied in common by these people and the Methodist Society.

By 1830 the membership of the Baptist Society had grown in significant numbers so that finally the time had come when they could erect a meetinghouse of their own, the site designated was on Main Street in Three Rivers and construction began immediately on the Federal style building. In September 1833, the meetinghouse was dedicated and The Reverend David Pease became the first pastor of the First Baptist Church of Three Rivers. For over ten years this new Society would thrive but like all things that come to pass, this too would change. For as the Town of Palmer grew and new village areas were being settled, many parishioners left this village and the church membership began a gradual decline. In 1847 a Second Baptist Society was formed and a meetinghouse erected in Depot Village thus dividing the membership. However, the First Baptist Society continued with its dwindling membership until 1917 when it voted to merge with the Union Evangelical Church Society.

METHODIST
CHURCH

Whether inspired or intimidated by the presence of the Baptist Society in the village, a small group of Methodist in 1833 would form a Society of their own. A class of ten persons met in the Old School House on the hill and were led by a lay leader, Royal Buffington. In 1837, Mrs. Hubbard donated land to the Society with the stipulation "that it be used only for the Methodist Chapel and at a time when religious services are discontinued, the land would revert back to the Hubbard heirs." The small Chapel was built on the southwest corner of Kelley and High Streets opposite the Old School House, and remained in use until 1856 when a new Methodist Meetinghouse was erected at Four Corners. In 1865 the Chapel was sold to M. M. Buffington and moved off site.

DISTRICT
SCHOOL
SYSTEM

Education was very important to our forefathers and they wasted no time or effort in providing adequate accommodations. The early school house was located on Kelley Street near the corner of South Street and was used until 1837 when the Palmer Co. erected a new "company school house", so called, on Springfield Street near what is now the northwest corner of Bridge Street.

The reason the Palmer Co. was allowed to build a school building was because at that period of time the Town of Palmer was operating under the District School System. In the District School System each district, Three Rivers being No. 2, was responsible to itself in that it had to raise its own taxes, build its own school house and pay its own bills.

The purpose of this System was to relieve the Town of the responsibility of providing a Common School. Many considered this system to be the greatest hindrance to improvement in the public schools for often the quality of teachers was determined by the affordability of the district and it has been written that the period from 1789 to 1859 was considered the "Dark Ages" for the Common School.

After being vacated the "Company School" so called, was then moved up Springfield Street to the east corner of the road that led into the mill yard. It was then converted into a tenement and post office. In 1872 this building was transformed once again - this time into the Palmer Mill office with an assembly hall on the second floor.

In 1911 this building was moved onto the Common where it continued functioning as the mill office while the present brick office building was erected. The following year the Company School building was moved a third time onto 41 Front Street where it was converted into a day nursery for the children of the mill workers. In 1933 this building was sold at an auction bringing the highest bid of all houses sold that day and is now a two family dwelling

In 1869 the District School System was eliminated in Palmer and the present system of a Central School policy that is supported by all the citizens and guided by an elected School Committee took president.

COMPANY
SCHOOL
HOUSE

DISTRICT
SCHOOL
DISCONTINUED

Apparently the inhabitants of the Town had become aware of the drawbacks in the District System some ten years before its demise, for in 1859 the Town voted to build a municipal schoolhouse west of the mill site, at a cost of \$4,000.

In 1882 the municipal schoolhouse was enlarged at a cost of \$3,500, and steam heat replaced the old wooden stove. This wooden building would serve the children of Three Rivers, and at times adults, until 1908 when it was replaced by the present brick Three Rivers Grammar School. Later the old 1859 schoolhouse was sold to the Otis Company and moved to the southeast corner of Springfield Street at Bridge where it was converted into a recreational facility and renamed Pickering Hall.

PICKERING HALL

Pickering Hall became the social center of the village offering programs for just about everyone. There was a bowling alley, pool room, library and classrooms where instruction for sewing, cooking, canning and even Americanization classes for the foreign born. On the second floor there was a large room that served as a dance hall or exhibition hall and at times a theater for both live entertainment and later motion pictures.

The building also had the added luxury of "Hot Showers" that were available to anyone who desired their use. The hot water was furnished, as was the steam heat in many of the tenements, by a recycling system using the spin-off-energy produced by the mill's power plant.

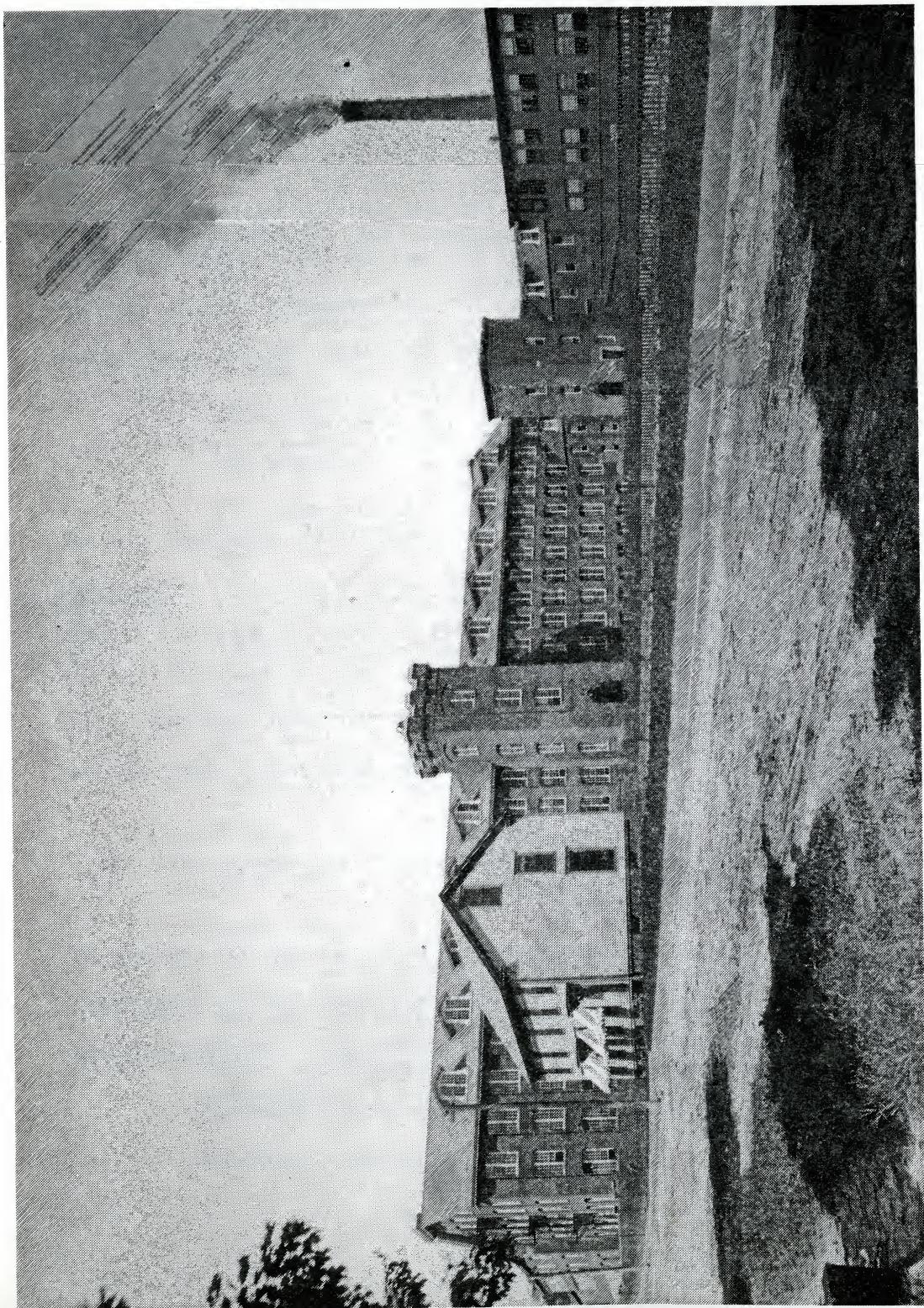
In 1916 four rooms in Pickering Hall were granted to the Palmer School Department to be used for grades 4, 5 and 6. Some of these classrooms remained active until April 23, 1926 when fire destroyed all of the original main portion of the old building with only the wing addition remaining intact.

The timing of this fire was the only fortunate happening of this event because, the new Wennameasic School just off East Main Street was into its final stage of construction thus allowing the students of the burned out classrooms to be transferred into the new building without an untimely delay in the school year schedule.

Unfortunately the Three Rivers Fire Department did not fare as well. In 1917 a two story "Fire House" addition had been attached to the eastside of Pickering Hall as a storage garage for their new fire engine and a meeting hall for the firemen. The fire consumed this fire house building, but not the fire engine which had been moved out of harms way and put into immediate action.

It would be years before this fire engine would have a permanent home again.

That portion of Pickering Hall that was not destroyed by the fire (the 1882 addition) was later sold to Frank Chudy who lowered the building to ground level, covered the facade with brick and converted it into his hardware store.



Palmer Mill of Otis Company at Three Rivers ca. 1872

CHAPTER IV
A New Beginning

May 16, 1863, "The large Cotton Mill factory belonging to the Palmer Co. at Three Rivers was destroyed by fire Sunday morning", so began the story in the Palmer Journal that day. The story told of the destruction that would bring change to so many lives, for this was the time of the Civil War, a time of austerity in all non-essential productions. Anxiety once again blanketed the village as it had 30 years before with the Three Rivers Manufacturing Co. crisis. This time, however, fate was not so kind and no benefactors were coming forth to the rescue of the Palmer Co. By October, it became apparent that the Palmer Mill Corp. would not rebuild and so the corporators voted to sell all remaining assets to John S. Wright of Boston, who was a major stockholder.

Eight years passed before there was any sign of activity that the mill might be rebuilt. The first sign came as an article in the Palmer Journal dated August 19, 1871 which read, "S. R. Lawrence (Real Estate Broker) was buying up several properties around the Common on Maple, Front and Park Streets. It is understood that these purchases are for a company who proposes rebuilding the burned mill, and giving life to the village again; which is good news to the dwellers in that deserted hamlet."

The following week a second article appeared in the Journal stating, "The rebuilding of the burnt mill at Three

OTIS COMPANY

Rivers and the renewal of manufacturing there will add from 300 to 500 to the population. The Pickering privilege below the old one has been purchased so that double power may be obtained and an additional mill be built if the company so desires.

The village has been "as dead as Chelsea" for the past ten years and this move toward rebuilding is one of the encouraging sights which are manifesting themselves in Town."

PALMER MILL
OF OTIS CO.
AT THREE
RIVERS

The official transfer of the mill property took place on February 9, 1872 when the Otis Company of Ware bought all of the Joseph S. Wright holdings and then formed a new corporation naming it "The Palmer Mill of the Otis Company at Three Rivers".

Two months later the April 13 Palmer Journal reported, "The little village which has lain dormant so long is putting on a business-like air that is inspiring to its old settlers. One hundred hands are already working, putting in the 290 ft. x 75 ft. foundation of the new mill."

At first the new mill produced only cotton flannel but within a few years the looms were adapted to weave a variety of different material which included denim, fancy shirting and colored goods.

The re-establishment of manufacturing was a turning point in the prosperity of this village, for the Palmer Mill grew rapidly during the decade, increasing its workforce at

an astounding pace. The village had began bustling with all kinds of new activites for new people were coming into the village almost daily.

One of the new arrivals was that of Dr. Silas Ruggles who came in the spring of 1872, and moved into a house on East Main Street. Dr. Ruggles acquired a large and remunorative practice in town and took an active interest in its growth and prosperity. He became a large landowner and with the help of his sons, Frank and Charles, planned and layed out a major part of the east side of this village.

DR. SILAS
RUGGLES

Aside from being a very fine physician, Dr. Ruggles was also a chemist and an accomplished inventor. As a chemist he developed and ran the Red Letter Chemical Co., a business that was carried on by his son Frank.

As an inventor he derived many useful products among which were: the rotary fan blower, a cheese press and the Ruggles windmill. The latter invention was implemented as a part of the "Ruggles Aquaduct System", a private water company owned and operated by Charles Ruggles. The Aquaduct System began at the springs on Kelley Hill. The water then ran through a series of pipes down the hill and across what is now Cheneyville into a holding cistern located on the riverbank; then passing through another series of pipes that were layed in the riverbed to the land on the other side. Then it was forced up into another cistern which was located on the fourth floor of the tank house, so called, on Bourne Street.

RUGGLES
AQUADUCT
SYSTEM

The movement of the water from the first cistern into the tank house cistern was aided by the Ruggles Windmill. The water then was distributed by gravity and fed into the four homes on East Main Street that belonged to this private Aquaduct System.

By 1873 the total population of the village had grown to about 125 families. Of this number nearly 100 hands worked directly for or in relation to the Palmer Mill. Interestingly enough, the makeup of nationalities at that time was mainly Anglo-Saxon with a few Irish and only two of French heritage. However, within a few short years these figures would change dramatically.

BRICK BLOCKS
SPRINGFIELD
STREET

The mill continued with its expansion in production so, once again, a larger workforce was needed to fulfill the necessary job requirements. Unfortunately company housing was now at a critical state, one reason being that the four large wooden blocks on Springfield Street that had been acquired with the J. S. Wright's holdings had burned to the ground in the fall of 1872. The need to replace this housing capacity was now at hand and Palmer Company began immediately to erect three large brick blocks, on the same site as replacements for that which had burned. At the same time they also built several more smaller wooden houses around the Public Common on Maple, Front and Kelley Streets.

CENTRAL VERMONT
& ATHOL ENFIELD
RAILROADS

This same year, (1873), the Springfield, Athol and North-eastern Railroad became a part of the village's growing transportation system. The New London Northern which began as the

Amherst Belchertown Railroad and then eventually became the Central Vermont had, from the very beginning, been an essential part of the north/south supply line to the mill. And now with the coming of this new railroad, the east/west market would give even greater mobility to the trafficking of the mills products.

In 1881 the Boston and Albany Railroad bought the Springfield, Athol and Northeastern and renamed it the Athol Enfield Railroad, a name seldom used, for most of its patrons affectionally called it "The Rabbit Train" because it made so many short hops between stations.

As the village population grew so did its commercial activity. By 1874 there were two new commercial enterprises that entered on the scene. The Holden brothers, who came from Hubbardston, Mass., were now opening a general store over near the mill complex and John Twiss, who having resigned as station master from the New London Northern Railroad, was now the owner and operator of the Twiss Livery Stables.

Unlike today's developers who speculate on growth pattern, the Palmer Mill built housing only when there was an actual growth need. Therefore, the erratic building cycles that the village experienced were dedicated almost entirely by the prosperity of the textile industry. 1875 was a good year, no doubt, for three additional large tenement blocks were erected this time on the north side of the Chicopee River across from the mill site. This type of pattern would continue again and again throughout the lifetime of the textile mill.

HOLDEN BROS.

STORE

JOHN TWISS

LIVERY

THREE LARGE

TENEMENTS

NORTHSIDE OF

CHICOPEE RIVER

Y.M.C.A.
READING ROOM
ASSOC.

Housing and commercial enterprise were but two of the needs being addressed, at this time, within this expanding community. Early in the decade the Three River's Y.M.C.A. was organized and a Reading Room Assoc. was formed. Between them they seemed to satisfy both the cultural and social activity need of the day.

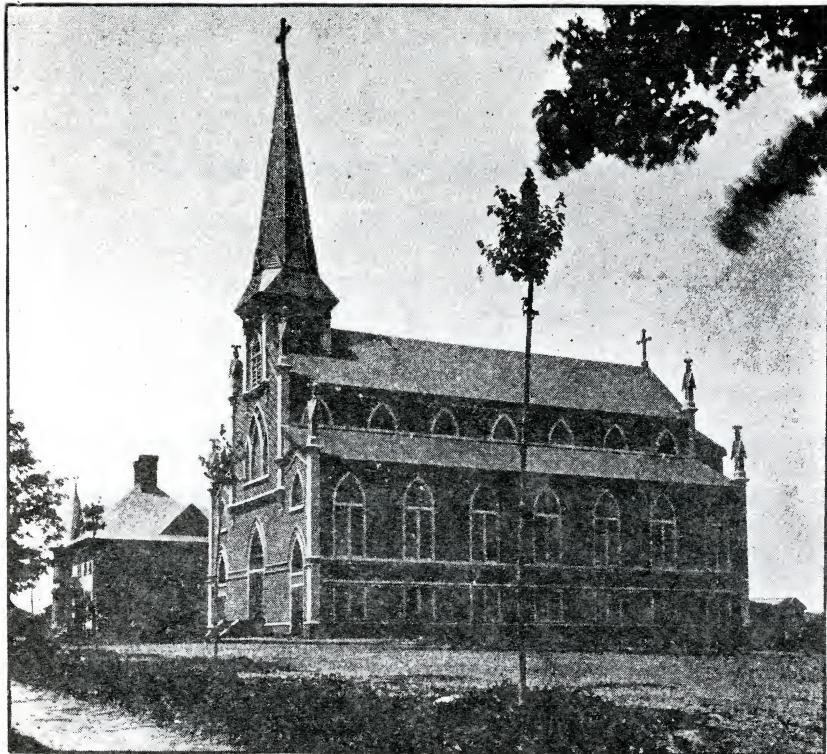
UNION
EVANGELICAL
CHURCH

The Baptist Church was the church of the village and had long since held a predominate roll for the Methodist Society had previously joined with the Thorndike group of Four Corners in 1854, thus leaving the Baptist Society unopposed. Now, however, a small group of Protestant mill workers from English speaking Canada were seeking to establish another Protestant Church Denomination and in 1876 with a membership of 37 they succeeded in forming The Union Evangelical Church Society.

The Society was a small but active religious group composed of members of different Christian churches but approached most nearly to the congregational form of worship. Determined to be recognized as a formable body this Society, with the help of the Palmer Co. who donated the land, was able to build a meetinghouse the following year. This Bridge Street land gift might appear on the surface to be an endorsement on the part of the mill owners of a religious preference, when actually it was only a gesture of good will. For this was the decade of a great religious revival throughout the Town of Palmer, and a time when the majority of the church meetinghouses were built. 1875 Advent Church, Palmer Depot;

1870's CHURCH
BUILDINGS

1876 St. Mary's Roman Catholic, Thorndike Village; 1878 St. Thomas Roman Catholic, Palmer Depot; 1879 St. Bartholomew's Roman Catholic, Bondsville; and 1879 St. Paul's Universalist, Palmer Depot.



St. Anne's Parish Church ca. 1884

CHAPTER V

The French Connection

At the close of the 70's decade, the village had begun to take on a new look. Aside from the housing accommodations for the mill workers, new streets were also being laid. Where here-to-fore, the road to Belchertown had been reached by passing through the millyard from Springfield Street to Barker Street and onto Belchertown Road, it now extended directly from Palmer Road northerly crossing Springfield Street and the Chicopee River joining Belchertown Road at Barker Street and is now known as Bridge Street. The millyard road was then discontinued as a public way. At the same time the eastside of the village; (across the Quaboag River), was also undergoing rapid development both commercially and industrially.

BRIDGE STREET

In the spring of 1880, the Riverside Hotel was erected and P. H. Rockford became the landlord. This eastside hotel has been in service to the public almost continuously since that time with only the change of landlords dictating its style and substance.

RIVERSIDE HOTEL

The Heath and Gould Market, located west of the hotel on Main Street near the riverbank began a change in ownership that same year. Edward Shaw of Belchertown bought the Gould interest and the following year became the sole owner when Mr. Heath retired. In 1885 he was joined by his brother,

SHAW BROS.

STORES

Homer, and together they expanded the business into a general store, specializing in furniture. The Shaw brothers were very successful businessmen and continued to expand and diversify. In 1895 they leased a second building where they promoted the sales of stoves, tinware and plumbing supplies.

In 1944 the original Shaw Bros. store located on Main Street where the bank buildings are today, was sold to Dennis Horgan and became the first drugstore. However, a short time later a new drugstore building was erected adjacent to it and in 1952 the Shaw building was destroyed by fire.

The second or leased building still stands however, at 90-92 Main Street, and is now a second hand supply store.

HAYNES BOX
FACTORY

The year 1881 witnessed the beginning of a new industry into the village. Where previously aside from the larger textile mill, only small shops such as the carriage maker, reed shop and plaining mill were present, now there was to be a larger plant that would make boxes. The Box Factory, so called, owned and operated by Charles B. Haynes was located at the foot of what is now Belanger Avenue. Its major product was a packing box called a "shuck" and its primary customers were the large textile mills. The convenience of supply and demand within the Town of Palmer alone was enough to bring prosperity to this new industry within a short period of time. The Box Factory was in production about 20 years before it closed its doors. Mr. Haynes then sold the building to Joseph Belanger and went into semi-retirement as a farmer.

The 1880's would become another transition decade for the Palmer Mill. The demand for manufactured goods had increased dramatically over the past ten years and the need for a larger workforce was evident. However, the supply of new workers from this area was critical forcing the mill owners to send their agents far afield in search of a new resource.

As a result of this scouting, a large contingent of French speaking Canadians came to work in the mill and settled into the village.

The presence of these French Canadians brought about major changes in the village life style. Where once only English was the spoken language in the mill, now French becoming nearly as common. Likewise with religious practices, where here-to-fore only English speaking Protestant churches had made a presence in the village, now the newcomers were seeking to establish a French speaking Roman Catholic parish.

Their efforts were soon rewarded and in 1882 the Parish of St. Anne's was formed and Father Lamy was called to serve as pastor.

August 25, 1881 "Three Rivers is having something of a boom in building just now. The Palmer Mill has finished six tenement houses, Dr. Ruggles a neat cottage house on the back of his lot on Thorndike Road (Main Street), and is about to cut two streets through and open up 35 building lots. Heath

FRENCH
CANADIAN
IMMIGRATION

ST. ANNE'S
PARISH

1882 BUILDING
BOOM

and Shaw have a new store nearly done and L. Giffin (carpenter), is putting in a foundation for a dwelling house."

The Giffin house was sold to Father Lamy and became the first St. Anne's Rectory. The second and present rectory was built in 1888.

ST. ANNE'S
CHURCH
BUILDING

July 11, 1884, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Silas Ruggles whose gift of land determined the site, and to the support of the parishioners who raised the necessary funds; the construction of the St. Anne's Parish Church began. By September of that same year, the basement portion of the building was enclosed and the first worship service at St. Anne's Church was held. This was a joyful occasion for the parishioners because the past two years they had held their service in the Town Hall at Four Corners.

ST. ANNE'S
SCHOOL

This "Basement Church" so called, would serve the St. Anne's parish for six years before enough funds were raised to complete the upper portion of the elegant Gothic style church. The basement that had served so well as a sanctuary was now converted into four classrooms with a large assembly hall in the center of the building. In 1900 a wooden Convent building was erected on Charles Street to house the eight teaching nuns and in 1903 it is recorded that 264 pupils were enrolled in this school. The grades taught were first through eighth thus requiring the pupils to attend the ninth grade at the Three Rivers Grammar School to complete their elementary

education. For many this would be their complete formal education for very few village children went onto high school during the early years.

December 3, 1922, while many of the parishioners were attending an evening meeting at the Circle Canadian Hall, fire broke out at their beautiful Gothic style church. Before the night was through, both the church and the convent were completely destroyed. Although the firemen were successful in controlling the blaze that night, the fire would continue to burn slowly for weeks because of large supplies of coal stored in the basement bins.

Once again the parishioners chose to rebuild their church, and as before, they began with a basement church. In 1923, the new church foundation was laid on the same site as the old, this time however, the school was removed from the church building and a separate school house was erected at the rear of the church on the Pleasant Street side. The convent was also rebuilt at its former site except it was now built of cast stone block.

It would be 26 years before the upper portion of this church was rebuilt, but rebuilt it was and on May 15, 1949 the dedication service Mass was held in all its triumphant glory.

This art deco-style building is as distinctive in today's architecture as was the Gothic style original church in the Victorian era. Both of these church buildings have been/are

GOTHIC STYLE
ST. ANNE'S
CHURCH FIRE

SECOND
BASEMENT
CHURCH

SCHOOL AND
CONVENT

ART DECO-STYLE
CHURCH
BUILDING

FIRE

a landmark of the village. Adversity seemed to plague this church and fire once again, became its nemesis and it the victim. This time the fire was intentionally set as a cover for theivery and by morning, the interior of the building was completely gutted, but the limestone exterior walls remained intact. Father Levesque, Pastor of St. Anne's is quoted as saying, "I watched it burn for eight hours. It eats at your heart but I told people, we lost a building but we didn't lose the Church. The people are the Church". Although December 28, 1980 had been another tragic blow to the parishioners of St. Anne's, February 21, 1982 was a time of joy. This was the day of "appreciation" when the doors to St. Anne's were thrown open to the community, both Catholic and Protestant alike, as an expression of gratitude for their generous support in the rebuilding and restoration of this beautiful church.

BAPTIST HILL

The adaption of so many foreign customs, foreign not only in language but also in religious practice, was apparently unsettling to the more established Anglo-Saxon residents. They were anxious that their own identity not be lost in the reshaping of the village complex. This undoubtedly was the reason behind the article that appeared on the Town Warrant at the 1885 Annual Town Meeting. The Article reads:

"to see if the Town will consent to the name "Baptist Hill" being applied to the eminence lying south and west of the Village of Three Rivers in said Town of Palmer".

The Town consented and the hill was so named.

That same year 1885, the Union Evangelical Church enlarged its meetinghouse by adding two rooms to the rear of the building in order to accommodate its growing congregation. Whether the increase was due to a religious revival or just plain competition is yet to be determined.

Competition between the ethnic groups would be the rule rather than the exception for many years to come. Competition in the workplace and religious practice; competition in business, society and recreation. This was not an adverse situation for it helped to relieve the tensions which occur during the adjustment period of learning to accept one another's life style.

One of the first groups to form was that of the Ancient Order of United Workmen, a popular fraternal insurance order that was instituted in September 1886 as local Chapter No. 69 with 36 Charter members. The meetings were held in the hall above the Palmer office. This was a non-political, non-sectarian order available to every white man of good moral and social standing between the ages of 21 - 45, if in good "bodily health". "The name of the Order is derived from the foundation of its principle that it is the duty of every member to lead a life of usefulness, a principle as ancient as creation. It is not a trade or labor organization but derives its name from the fact that every man is a workman,"

UNION
EVANGELICAL
CHURCH
ADDITION

ANCIENT ORDER
OF UNITED
WORKMEN

either muscle or brain. It aids its members in times of sickness and distress and pays to widows and orphans of deceased members \$2,000. The fraternal feature of the organization draws the members together by a common objective and the social life of the community is benefited thereby."

The following year 1887, the French speaking people made a countermove by organizing the Societe De Secours Mutual Circle Canadien De Three Rivers. The meetings were held in the basement Church of St. Anne's and other than the fact that all the membership was exclusively French speaking men, the principle and purpose of the organization were the same as that of the Ancient Order.

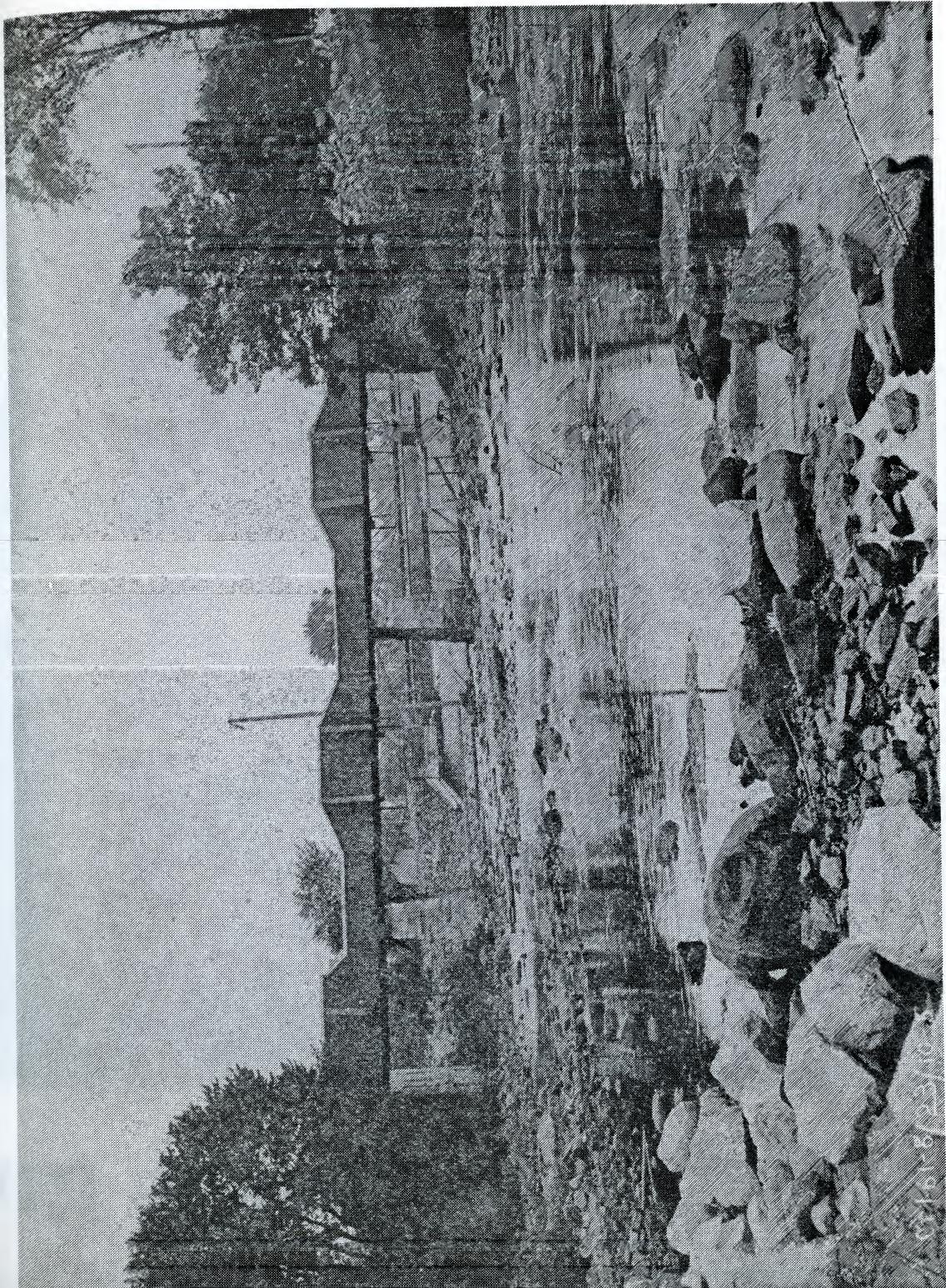
ST. JEAN
BAPTIST

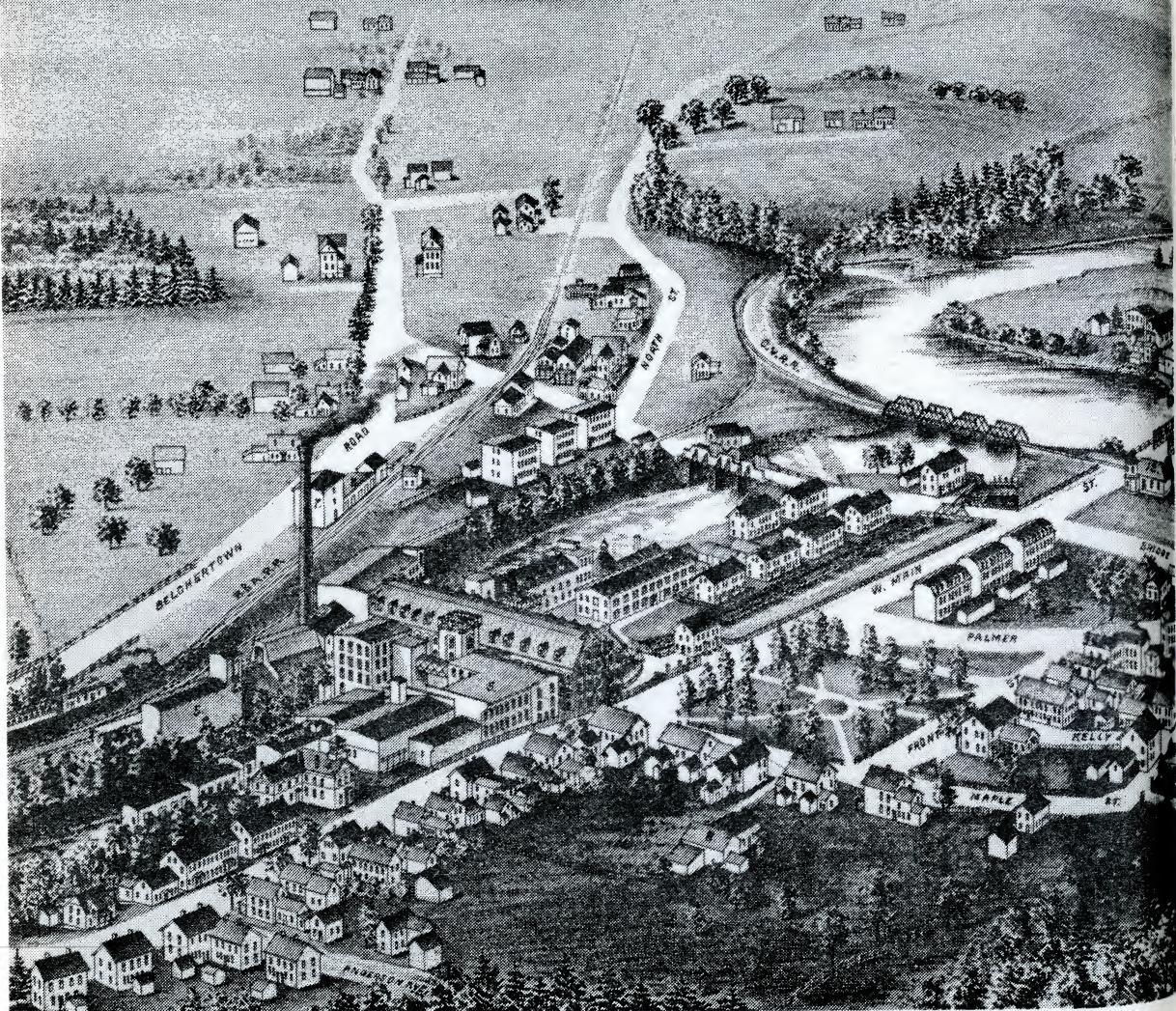
In 1909 this society changed its name to St. Jean Baptist No. 263.

ST. ANNE'S
CEMETERY

With the formation of the French church; and now the French Insurance Society, it was appropriate that a French Cemetery would soon follow. At the 1887 Annual Town Meeting a favorable vote was given; Article 24, which granted permission to use a certain tract of land for burial purposes. This tract of land is now St. Anne's Cemetery.

Wooden bridge across Chicopee River ca. 1879

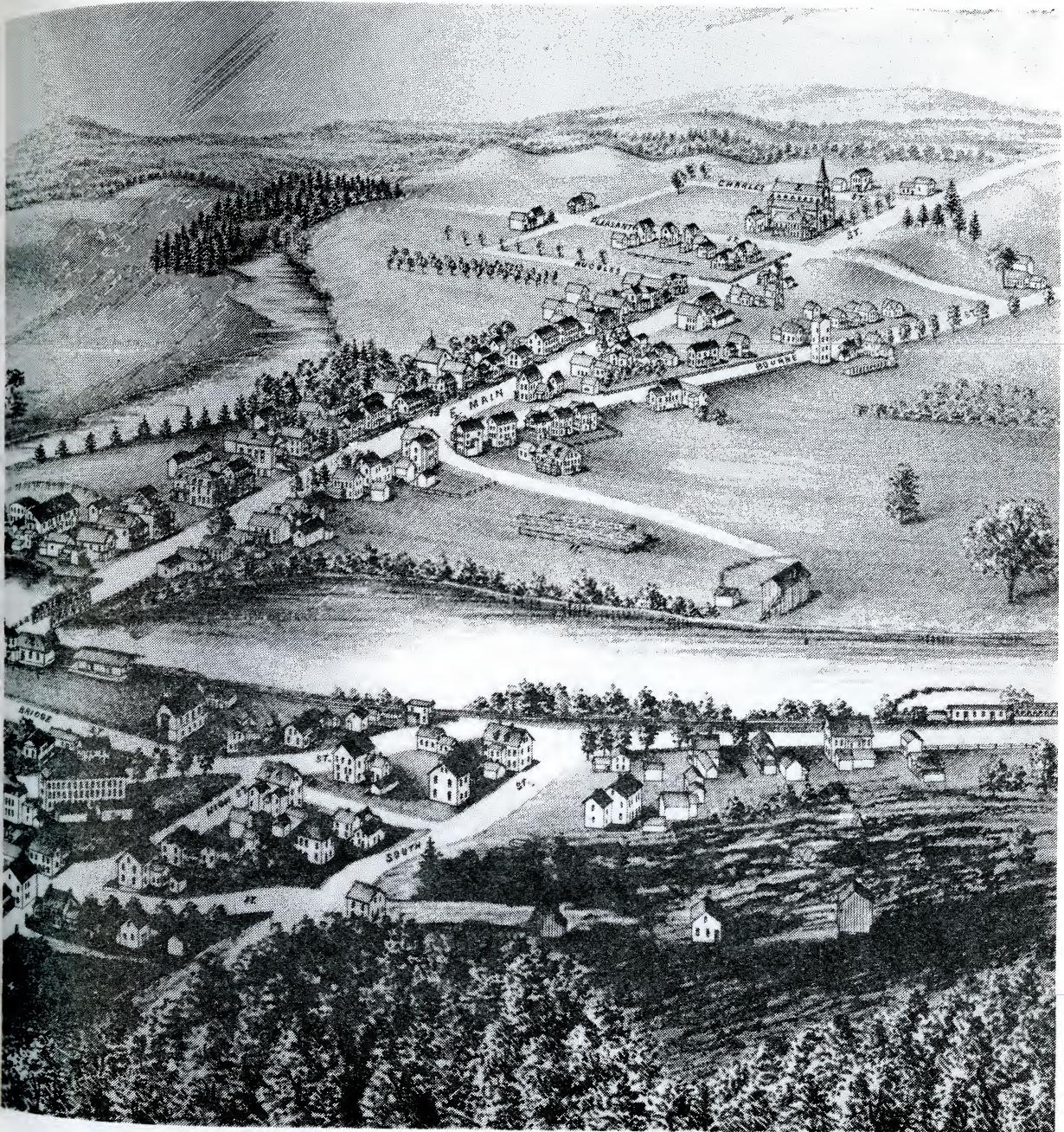




MURKIN LITHO. CO., TROY, N.Y., 1893.

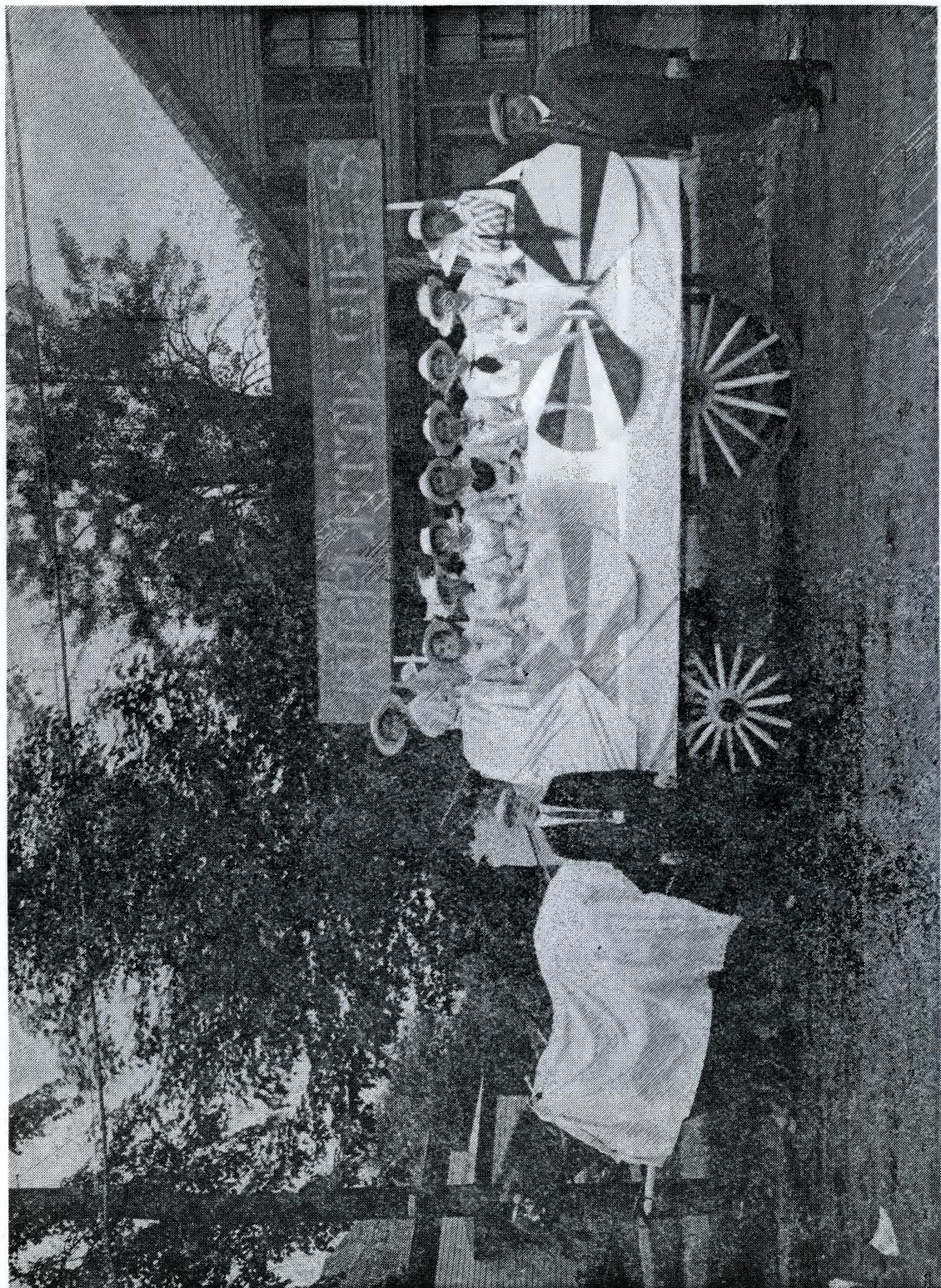
- 1 Union Evangelical Church.
- 2 Baptist Church.
- 3 St. Ann Roman Catholic Church.
- 4 Public School.
- 5 Palmer Mill, (of Otis Co.) R. C. Newell, Supr.
- 6 John F. Twiss, Livery & Sale Stables.
- 7 Fillmore & Lamey, Coal, Wood, Flour, Meal and Feed.
- 8 B. & A. R. R. Station, Geo. F. Orcutt, Agt.
- 9 John Wilson, House Furnishings.
- 10 Mrs. M. Orcutt, Millinery & Fancy Goods.
- 11 Charles P. Haynes, Wood, Coal & Ice.

THREE RIV



ERS, MASS.

- 12 C. V. R. R. Station.
- 13 Arthur Grise, Bakery.
- 14 L. P. Desmarais, Pharmacist & Druggist.
- 15 A. P. Trudeau, Market & Post Office.
- 16 Joseph Belanger, Undertaking, Carriage and Blacksmith shop.
- 17 Cosigny, Harness Shop.
- 18 L. M. Paine, Millinery and Fancy Goods.
- 19 Frank A. Ruggles, Carpenter & Builder.
- 20 Chas. A. Ruggles, Carpenter & Builder.
- 21 E. Strois, Physician & Surgeon.



Palmer Mill float - John King Day Celebration 1916

CHAPTER VI

The Last Decade of the 19th Century

In 1891 the Town of Palmer was divided into four precincts with the village of Three Rivers becoming Precinct C with a tally of 139 eligible voters. There were about 1,700 residents in the village at this time and 625 of them worked at the mill: 350 men and 275 women.

The demand for manufacturing goods was increasing at a steady rate thus triggering, once again, necessary changes in the mill's operations and the village character.

One of the first changes was the installation of a boiler house/steam plant to compensate the hydroelectric power that had always serviced the mill

In order to erect these buildings it was necessary to remove the three large company tenement blocks from the north side of the Chicopee River west of Bridge Street and reset them on the southwest side of North Street. Two of these blocks are still in place where they were reset, the third however was torn down in 1934 to make room for a two family dwelling on the corner of Bridge at North Street.

The early years of this new decade saw lots of change other than those of the mill properties. The Union Evangelical Church erected a parsonage on Kelley Hill at the corner of South and Kelley Streets. This land which had belonged to the Palmer Mill was historically the site of the first school house in the village.

STEAM/BOILER
PLANT

NORTH STREET
BLOCKS

UNION
EVANGELICAL
PARSONAGE

JOHN WILSON'S
STORE
BRIDGE STREET

John Wilson's new store on Bridge Street, next to Mrs. A. M. Orcutt's Dry Goods and Millinery Shop was erected. Both of these stores were opposite the Athol Enfield Railroad Station. John Wilson's Store is gone but Mrs. Orcutt's is now Lis' Market.

CENTRAL
VERMONT
RAILROAD
STATION

Palmer Journal 1892, "A new brick passenger station for the Central Vermont Railroad is now presenting a most attractive appearance to the Main Street. The former depot has been moved back on the lot and is to be used for freight service only." Both of these stations are now gone. In 1937 the passenger service for the Central Vermont Railroad was discontinued and a few years later the station was removed. However, the freight station remained until recently 1987 when it too was razed.

UNDERPASS

Palmer Journal 1892, "The grade crossing near Henry Ferrell's is to be changed. The highway will be turned under the tracks a short distance from the present crossing and an underpass, so called, will be established."

The summer of 1893 was another trying time for the village. The Palmer Mill had all but closed down and many employees were anxious about their jobs. The end of September showed no improvement in the situation according to the remarks by Mr. Roscues Newell, Superintendent of the Palmer Mill. He states that "he has received no word of starting up, the reason being that the mill runs almost entirely on fine dress goods and the company does not care to fill store houses with such expensive goods. Thorndike Mill is working a three day week with ten percent wage cuts as is the Boston Duck Co."

Mr. Newell became Mill Agent in 1895, and remained in that position until his retirement in 1913. During his tenure Mr. Newell initiated many innovative changes within both the mill and the village. He shared a great concern for his employees welfare and fostered programs that were invaluable to their well being. He organized programs of teachers and classrooms for non-English speaking workers so that they might learn the language.

He then arranged for Americanization classes so that they might also become citizens. In 1910 he directed the building of the new sawtooth weave shed as well as the hydroelectric power plant just below the rapids in the Chicopee River. In 1912 Mr. Newell began building a private residence on Baptist Hill which he occupied upon his retirement in 1913. Here he lived out his remaining days, continuing to work and expand the apple orchard, now known as View North.

The ethnic makeup of the workers at the Palmer Mill in 1896 was that of 90% French, 9% Anglo-Saxon and 1% Polish. The work day was from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., six days per week, at \$6.00 per day, and it was not unusual to begin working at age 14 years.

The business climate at this time was that of a drug store, 6 grocery/general stores, harness maker, bakery, pool hall, 2 cigar stores, 2 meat markets, 2 millinery stores, 2 physicians, 1 dentist, 2 stables and 1 wheelwright/blacksmith. As creature comforts go there was only one house in the village with inside plumbing.

ROSCUES
NEWELL

APPLE
ORCHARD

BUSINESS
CLIMATE

INSIDE
PLUMBING

The village, however, had at last developed into a viable entity which requires some recognitions. Apparently others in town felt the same way according to an article in an 1896 Palmer Journal which reads:

"In town affairs this village (Three Rivers) plays an important part. Its vote is large enough to make a difference on any vital question."

THOUGHTS OF
CESSION

Evidently this statement provoked some of the village's "sidewalk thinkers" into promoting the idea of cession. Fortunately, it appears, wiser heads prevailed for a few months later a second article appeared saying:

"A project which was launched sometime ago to separate this village from the rest of the town did not meet with favor. Its residents seemed to realize as a whole that in union there is strength, and that the matter dropped before it had been well started."

DRUGSTORE

The year 1897 brought with it two new business establishments. The first was that of Lyman L. Keith, a newcomer to the village who opened a drugstore at 2 Main Street. Although the name was recently changed to Smith's Drugstore, the "Keith" and later "Keith and Horgan" Drugstore is still very much a part of our present village history.

BELANGER'S
UNDERTAKING
BUSINESS

The second new business owned and operated by Joseph Belanger was that of undertaking. Mr. Belanger, a French Canadian, had come to Three Rivers about 1890 and immediately

commenced practicing his trade as blacksmith and carriagemaker was now expanding his interest into that of undertaking. From its humble beginnings, the Belanger Undertaking Parlor has grown into a major business establishment and projects an impressive presence in the village.

As in the past, the social activities of the village seemed to keep pace with the business climate, as one expanded so did the other. Therefore, the formation of a second fraternal organization called the Artisans Canadian Fracios No. 83 by the French Canadian people was not entirely unexpected. This society, like the St. Jean Baptist before it offered the same type of benefits and social activities excepts its ties were with Canada as opposed to the U. S. based St. Jean.

There was another club or organization that formed the same year (1899) that was of an entirely different nature and as if in contrast to all that had gone on before, this new style of society, "The Order of Redmen - Wenimessit Tribe #122" was formed strictly for the social benefit of its members. It was a fraternal organization of good fellowship that mimiced the lifestyle of the villages' first resident and its members would often appear in Native American costume at parades and other public gatherings.

ARTISAN
CANADIAN
FRACIOS

ORDER OF
REDMEN



St. Peter & Paul's Church 1905

CHAPTER VII

Our Polish Heritage

As the decade came to a close it became apparent that the population within the village had changed once again. The Palmer Mill needing additional help to accommodate the ever increasing manufacturing demands had, for the past three years, been recruiting a large number of Polish immigrants so that by 1899 there were 169 Polish men and half as many Polish women employed at the mill. The introduction of this new heritage into the village would soon bring about other dramatic changes in the village lifestyle. One of the early ethnic changes to occur was the organization and establishment of a Roman Catholic Parish for Polish speaking people. Like the French speaking people before, the first meetings were made up of a small group of parishioners who met in private homes using lay leaders for religious instruction. Soon, however, as the parish membership grew, plans were developed for the calling of an ordained leader and the future building of a church.

One of the driving forces that support these ambitious goals was the newly formed society of St. Stanislaus Polish Lyceum. This society, organized in 1901 for the purpose of keeping the Polish spirit and customs alive in the community, would contribute vast influence in time, money and effort in assisting the parishioners with their objective.

The first milestone was reached in 1902 when The Reverend Wadau Lenz was appointed spiritual leader of this newly formed

POLISH
IMMIGRANTS

POLISH CHURCH

ST.
STANISLAUS
POLISH
LYCEUM

St. Peter and Paul Parish. With the continued help of the St. Stanislaus Lyceum membership, the parishioners with their new priest would soon reach that second milestone, that of erecting a church building.

ST. PETER &
PAUL'S CHURCH

"September 25, 1905, the cornerstone of the Polish Catholic Church at Four Corners was laid yesterday. construction began in July 1904 and has been in use several months although not completed."

so stated the article in the newspaper that day. This Federal styled building was erected upon an 11 acre parcel at a site chosen because of its central location to all four villages. The cost of the land was \$1,000 and the cost of the church \$18,000. It took nearly 3 years before the St. Peter and Paul's Church and Rectory were completed and the bell named "ANNA" BELL "Anna", was placed in the belfry. This bell called the faithful to Mass for many years before it was removed and replaced by an electrically controlled chime.

Today the retired "Anna" bell rests in honor on the front lawn of the church, mounted in a setting that pays tribute to its service.

RUGGLES HALL

In 1901 Charles Ruggles, son of Silas and now a general contractor, saw the need for a "meeting/recreation" hall that would accommodate any or all of the newly forming societies, erected a large building to the rear of his father's old homestead and named it Ruggles Hall. This hall would not only serve as a meeting place for societies but also as a meeting

place for the public at large. It became a forum for municipal discussions concerning village matters. One of the most important public meetings held here was that of the formation of the Three River's Fire Department. This hall also served as the movie theater for over 12 years and many an old timer has vivid memories of the silent movies and the piano playing of Mrs. Lavielle as she accompanied the films activity.

The first society to take advantage of this new meeting place was St. Stanislaus Polish Lyceum, a social club whose purpose was that of preserving the cultural traditions of the Polish people in their new land.

In 1911 the newly formed "Thaddeus Kosciusko" Polish American Citizen's Club would also hold their meetings at Ruggles Hall. The primary purpose of this club was that of education. The Polish people had become acutely aware of the need for Americanization if they were to participate in this country's affairs. By teaching the English language to its members, so as to prepare them for naturalization was the essential goal of this organization - a task that was well performed. Today the original goals of this society are no longer a pertinent issue and new goals have been adapted that support the whole community through many charitable endeavors.

By 1913 Ruggles Hall had all but been abandoned by the general public for the two newer recreational halls were exhibiting effectual competition. The Pickering Hall which had opened in 1909 and the Circle Canadian Hall which opened

THREE RIVER'S
FIRE
DEPARTMENT
SILENT MOVIE
THEATER
ST.
STANISLAUS
POLISH LYCEUM

POLISH
AMERICAN
CITIZEN'S
CLUB

in 1912 were offering much more elaborate facilities including motion picture shows.

Therefore, when Mr. Ruggles was approached by the St. Stanislaus Polish Lyceum with an offer to buy the building and property, Mr. Ruggles consented for the sum of \$7,500. The St. Stanislaus Society continued to use the hall until 1920 when the building was razed and the present two story brick building was erected.

POLISH HALL

The new Polish Hall, so called, was built, as was the French Hall, with the capacity for commerical business on the first floor and the meeting or club room on the second floor. Theoretically, the commercial first floor tenants would furnish the revenue necessary to support the second floor club activities.

POLISH
WOMEN'S CLUB

In 1924 the women of Polish heritage also desiring a voice in community affairs organized the Polish American Women's Citizens Political Club. The purpose of this club was three fold; education, political involvement and support of community business.

Both of the Citizen Clubs have succeeded far beyond their original goals and are contributing greatly to the general welfare of the village.

1905 CENSUS

Town Census of 1905 noted the division in population to be 36% foreign born of which 40% were Austrian (Polish), 25% French, 15% German and 6% Russian (Polish). These percentages were a mirror-like reflection of the population of the Village

of Three Rivers. Although those of Anglo-Saxon heritage continued their important rolls in the village, the foreign born, newcomers, were definitely impacting this community's life style. Between 1900 - 1920 this village was to witness many dramatic changes in its profile. Fire, a constant threat to all commercial enterprise, being one of the most frequent causes for these changes.

In the spring of 1900 the blacksmith, bakery, carriage-/undertaking shops complex on LaRiviere Street, owned by Joseph Belanger was completely destroyed by fire. Then on July 27th that same year, an article in the Palmer Journal stated that

1900 FIRE ON
LaRIVIERE
STREET

"Mr. Belanger has bought the building, used by C. P. Haynes for a box shop, for his blacksmithing and carriage business. His undertaking room will be in the same building. He will erect a tenement block and bakery on the site of the old (burned out) building."

Mr. Belanger's farsightedness for potential village growth would continue to influence many changes in the village landscape throughout his lifetime and even beyond.

In 1902 he purchased the Baptist Church parsonage on Main Street. The Church not having a resident minister was no longer in need of a parsonage. In addition he also purchased a parcel of land in the rear of the parsonage that had belonged to Charles Haynes. This was the beginning of the Belanger

BAPTIST
PARSONAGE

Complex, so called. In 1925 the "parsonage" would be moved back onto Belanger Street, directly behind the present Bonnayer residence and converted into a tenement block.

CEMENT BLOCK

In 1910 the large cement block on Belanger Avenue was built and in 1920 additional adjacent property was purchased thus enlarging the Belanger holdings. This latter purchase located to the west of the "parsonage" extended from Main Street to river's edge and included a small cottage house on Main Street belonging to John Wilson, a lumberyard to the rear of the small house, and a large ice house at the river's edge belonging to C. P. Haynes. In 1923 the cottage house was removed from Main Street and replaced down the hill at the foot of Belanger Street. The ice house was moved up from the river's edge, turned so that it faced up the Belanger Street hill and then converted into a tenement block. A third real estate development at the Belanger Complex, so called, that same year was the building of the "big yellow block" on Belanger Avenue.

A new wave of development began in 1925 with the removal of the parsonage from its Main Street site and the building of the present Bonnayer residence and funeral parlor in its place. Thirty-five years later an east wing was added to this building so as to provide a second undertaking parlor.

As the years passed, the Belanger family continued to expand its real estate interest in the Belanger Complex area. In 1929 the present hardware store was built on Main Street on

the former site of the cottage house. Two more tenement blocks would be added to this area as we know it today. One occupies the site of the former blacksmith/carriage shop which had been destroyed by fire in 1934, the other is sandwiched in between the former parsonage and cottage house on Belanger Street. Although the Belanger real estate holdings were to extend far beyond what has already been mentioned, this has remained the most concentrated area of them all.

In 1910 William Cheney, former paymaster at the Palmer Mill, now retired, purchased the large tract of land off Palmer Road that lies between the Central Vermont Railroad tracks and the Quaboag River. This land was then laid out into 181 building lots with 7 access streets and given the name Homestead Park. Fortunately for the town this was not another "Boom Town" era for to have that many houses (181) all with septic systems would have been an environmental nightmare in just a very few years.

HOMESTEAD
PARK

By 1915 only 10 of these lots had been sold and so in cooperation with George Cheney; son of the owner, a large portion of the undeveloped land in the northeast section was fenced off, a grandstand built and the area began its tenure as the official ballfield for the Franco-American Football and the local Pirates Baseball teams. The ballfield remained very active until the beginning of World War II when many of the players were called into the service.

CHENEYVILLE

The name Homestead Park has been lost in the passing of time for it was unofficially replaced by the name Cheneyville. Perhaps now that it really has developed into a residential park-like area, thought might be given to restoring its original name.

POWER HOUSE
AND DAM

The development of Homestead Park was only one of many changes that took place in the village during the year 1910. A new power house and dam was constructed by the Palmer Mill just below the rapids off Springfield Street and the old dam near the railroad bridge was destroyed. With the destruction of the old dam, the Mill Pond that had formed at the confluence of the Ware and Quaboag Rivers was also eliminated.

SAW TOOTH
WEAVE SHED

A new saw tooth weave shed building was added to the east side of the mill complex to accommodate the new machinery needed for the production of denim and duck ticking.

EAST SIDE
TENEMENTS

Charles Ruggles having sold the aquaduct land to William Cheney was now also selling 20 tenements located on the east side of the village to the Palmer Mill.

FIRE ON
MAIN ST. 1912

January 7, 1912 - Sunday morning - nearly the entire south side of Main Street became involved in a devastating conflagration. Three large business blocks; the Hartnett Block that housed the Quaboag Hotel; the one year old Circle Canadian building, and the Dunn Block were completely destroyed. Several other buildings and dwellings were also involved by either being completely consumed or severely damaged by this fire. It appears that once again adversity had besieged the village by taking away three of its key economic resources. Although

the village seemed to be down after the fire damage was assessed it was by no means out, for almost immediately the remaining business community rallied behind the fire victims enabling them to begin again.

The Circle Canadian was the first to begin rebuilding. The following account published in the Palmer Journal dated November 8, 1912 is a report of its progress.

REBUILDING
MAIN STREET

"There will be moving pictures in the future in the new Circle Canadian Hall on Main Street. The first will be this evening and hereafter it will be known as the Idle Hour Motion Picture Palace."

IDLE HOUR
THEATER

Surely there are many who still remember this "grand ole theater" and the many enjoyable hours spent therein. All three blocks were completed and open for business by 1914 and today they make up a greater part of the downtown business section of the village.

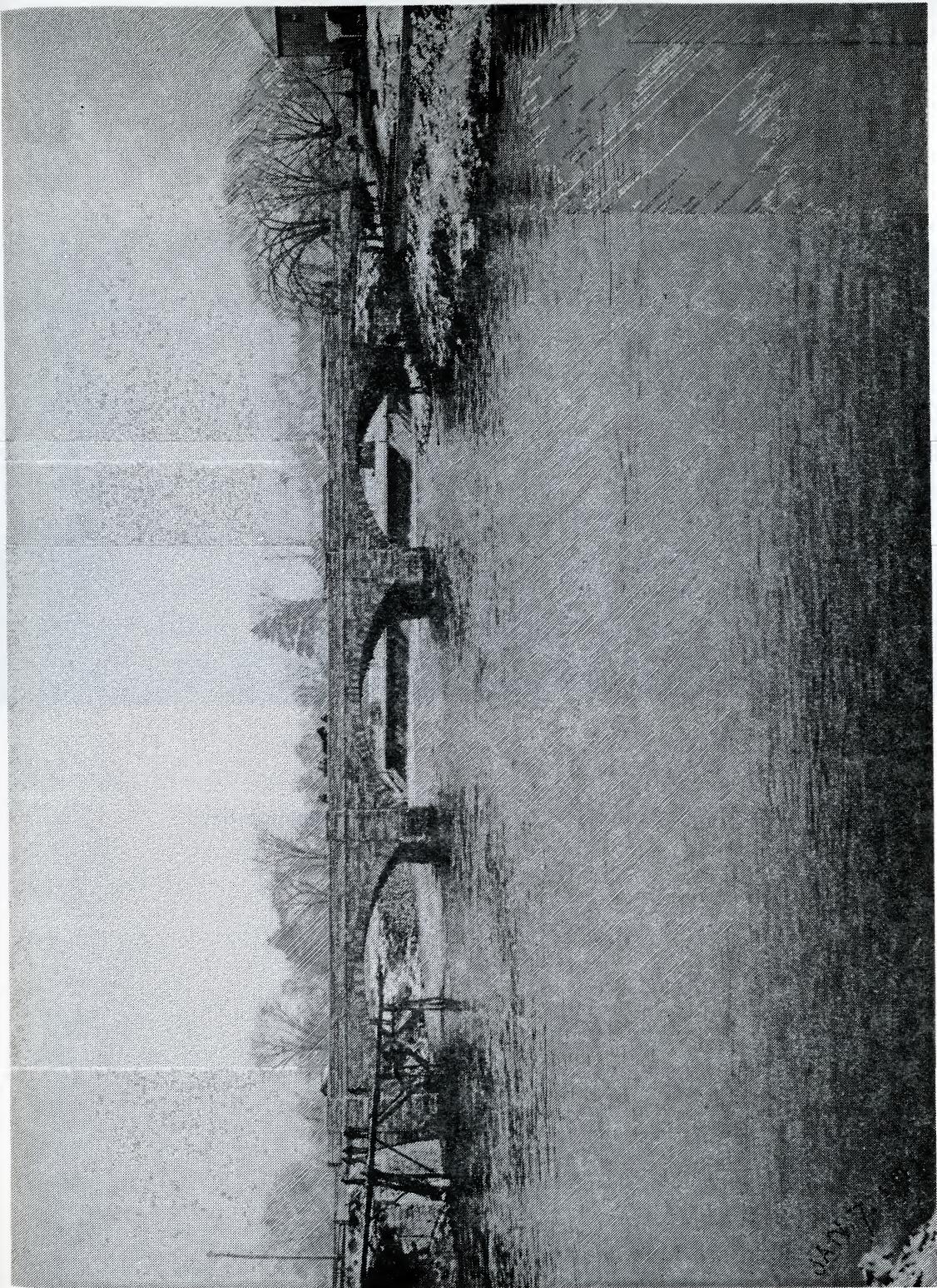
There were other changes taking place on the west side of the village during this "pre-teen" year. The mill agent's house situated on the southwest corner of High and Kelley Streets was moved down to 26 Maple Street and a "new agent's house" was built in its place. Incidentally, the "new agent's house" now belongs to Raymond Chudy.

AGENT'S HOUSE

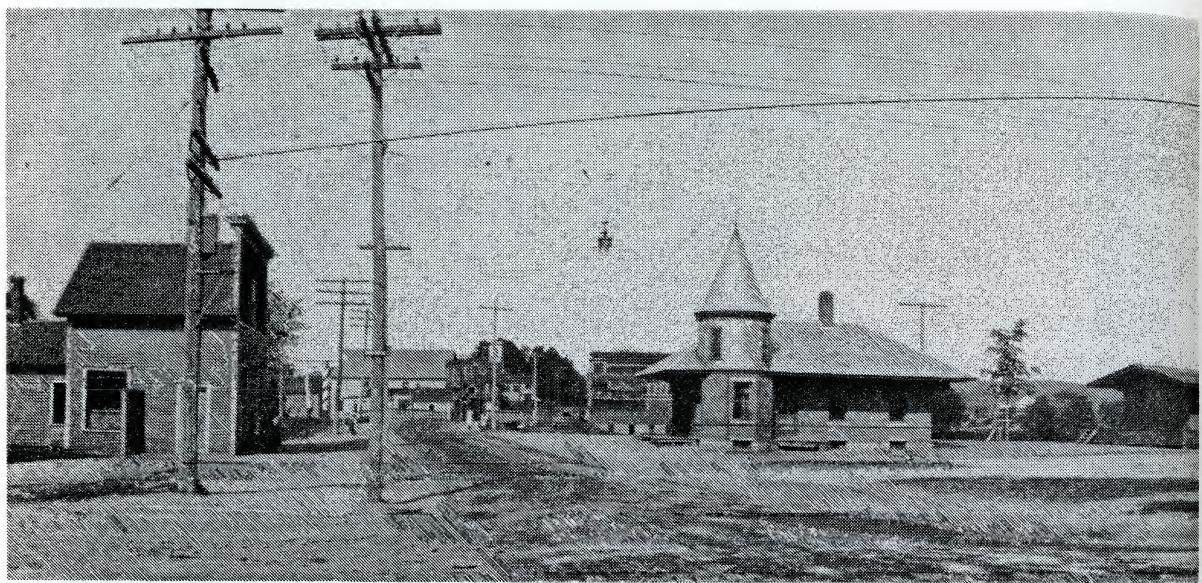
June 14, 1912, "Mr. F. A. Upham, mill agent; A. W. Warriner, Paymaster, and J. H. Trickett, overseer at the Otis Mill are building a large garage to accommodate their 3 autos. It is being built next to the company stable just off Maple Street."

THREE-CAR
GARAGE AND
STABLE

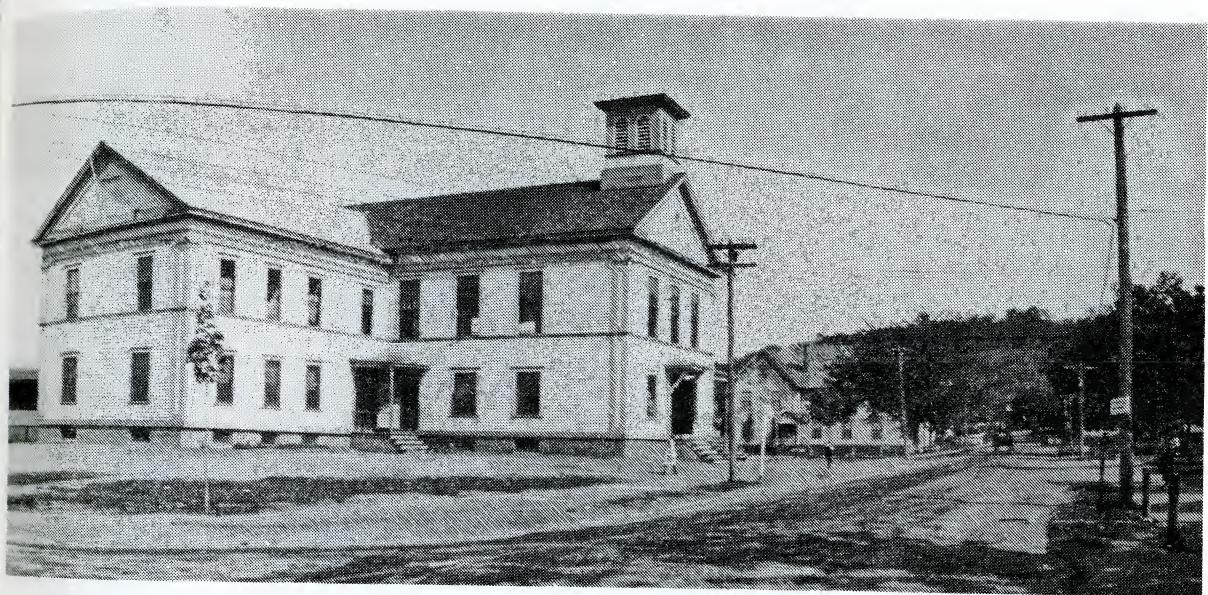
This garage is still standing at the foot of Maple Terrace and the company stable has since been converted into an industrial building.



Stone bridge across Chicopee River ca. 1910



Main St. looking east from Chudy's Corner
Post office building on the left
Pickering Hall on the right in the foreground
C. V. Passenger Station also on the right behind Pickering Hall
ca. 1910





Palmer Road tenements ca. 1921

CHAPTER VIII

Another Transition Period

By 1917, the U. S. A. had become fully involved with the war in Europe. Many young men from the Town of Palmer were called into service, and 7 of them died on the battlefield.

It is only fitting that they are so well remembered throughout the town by a memorial stone and bronze plaque on which their names have been inscribed. Each village took upon itself the responsibility of raising the necessary funds needed for the placement of a stone in their own village.

The Three Rivers Memorial, erected in 1919, was originally placed on the northwest corner of the Pickering Hall lot, (Main and Bridge), but in the early 1940's the stone was removed to the center of the village common; and in 1947 a second bronze plaque was attached commemorating the first serviceman that was killed in World War II. Plans had been generated by the Chamber of Commerce for the erection of a separate World War II memorial using the old Palmer Mill bell as the medium. But somehow these plans were abandoned and the present memorial attachment was chosen. Perhaps we should keep in mind that it's never too late to exercise a good idea.

Two other events which occurred in 1917 are worth mentioning because they are a barometer of the changing times.

The first being the merging of the Baptist Society with the Union Evangelical Society. Both churches had been experiencing a dwindling membership and so the decision to unite seemed to be the answer that best suited the memberships at large.

WORLD WAR I

MEMORIAL STONES

WORLD WAR II MEMORIAL

BAPTIST SOCIETY MERGED TO UNION EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Because the Union Church had the larger membership, their meetinghouse became the chosen place of worship. After the 1938 hurricane/flood however, the Baptist meetinghouse, which was on higher ground, became the new Union Evangelical Church building, and the former building was sold. For many years it served as the headquarters for Gale's Auctions before it was torn down. All that remains today is the Sunday School Annex that was built in 1905.

INSIDE PLUMBING

The second noteworthy event was to be a creature comfort that was shared by all who lived in mill housing for this was the year that inside plumbing was installed in all tenements.

Due to World War I, the demand for finished goods had increased dramatically and the need for additional workers who would require housing became evident. The company's response to this need is explained in the following newspaper article:

January 10, 1918 Palmer Journal, "Charles Ruggles sold to Otis Company all his land and buildings in Three Rivers. The sale included 11 parcels, 12 buildings and 2 tenements. The Otis Company is to practically duplicate its present mill next summer and buying the Ruggles property to provide housing for employees."

One of the tenements and five of the buildings are located on what is now Prospect Street. the tenement was actually a barn that had been converted ca. 1910 and the five buildings were matchbox-like duplex houses with flat roofs built by Charles Ruggles in 1898.

About 1920 the Otis Company built two additional duplex houses on this street and renovated all the others by adding a gable roof and covering the exterior wall with large sheets of tin plate siding. Because of this new facade, it did not take long before the villagers renamed the street "Tin Can Alley".

TIN CAN ALLEY

The economy of the village continued to prosper during the early 1920's. So much so, that the Otis Company began another "building boom". First to be built was the five story mill on the riverbank behind the present mill along with an addition to the sawtooth weave shed. The following year (1921) more housing accommodations would be added; a total of 22 tenements on Palmer Road and South Streets; 18 tenements on Maple Terrace, and 12 tenements on Anderson Avenue and Springfield Streets.

FIVE STORY MILL AND WEAVE SHED ADDITION

It was beyond anyone's imagination that a dozen years later all of the Otis Company holdings would be auctioned off to the highest bidders, and that many of the tenement workers would soon be landlords themselves.

In the meantime, full production was the uppermost concern of the mill agent, Mr. Upham, and because of this he was instrumental in setting up an Education Department that could work in conjunction with the mill's operations.

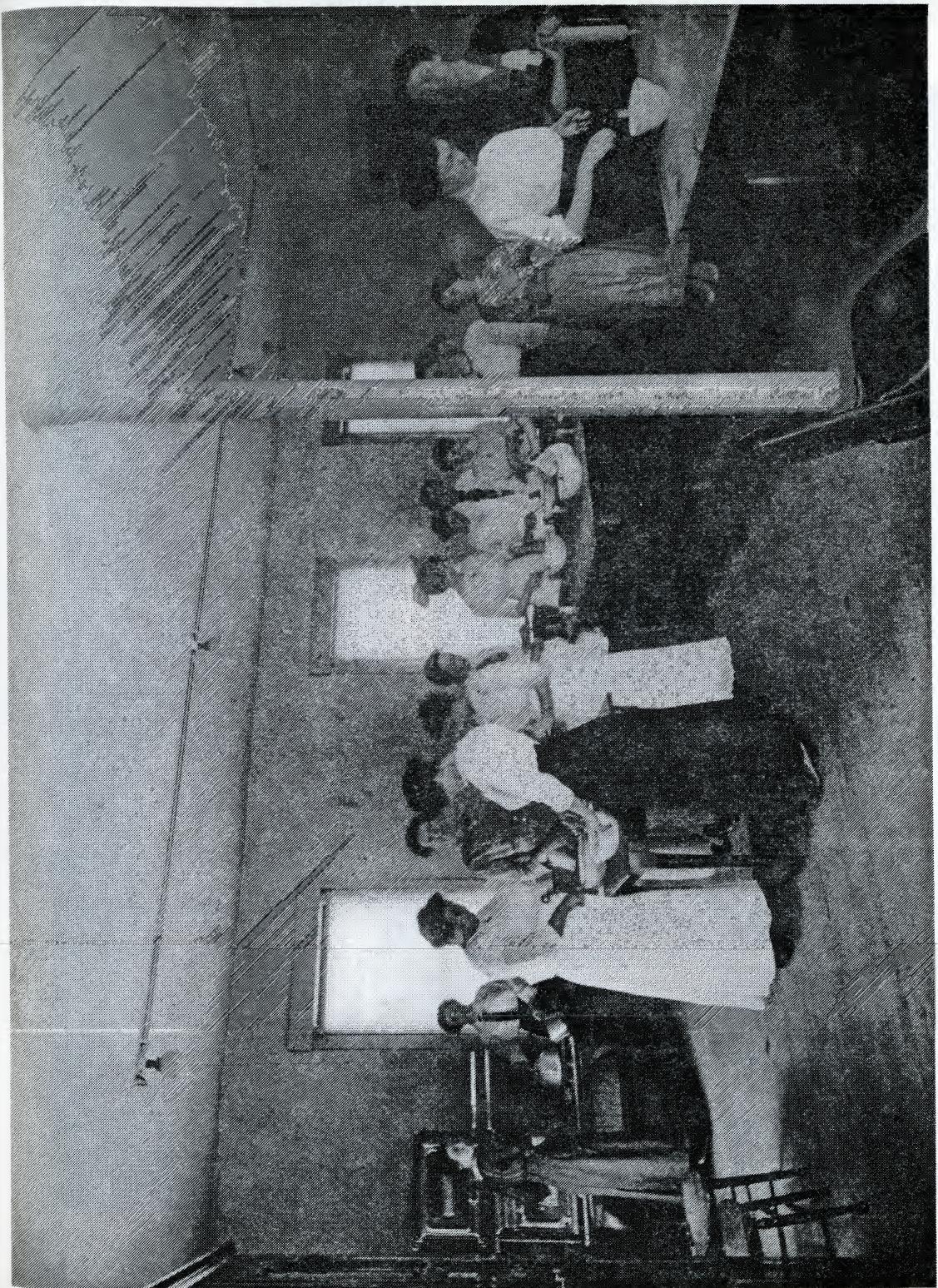
The Vestibule School, so called, because of where the classes were held, began in 1922. "The paramount issue was the training of the employees to become efficient workmen."

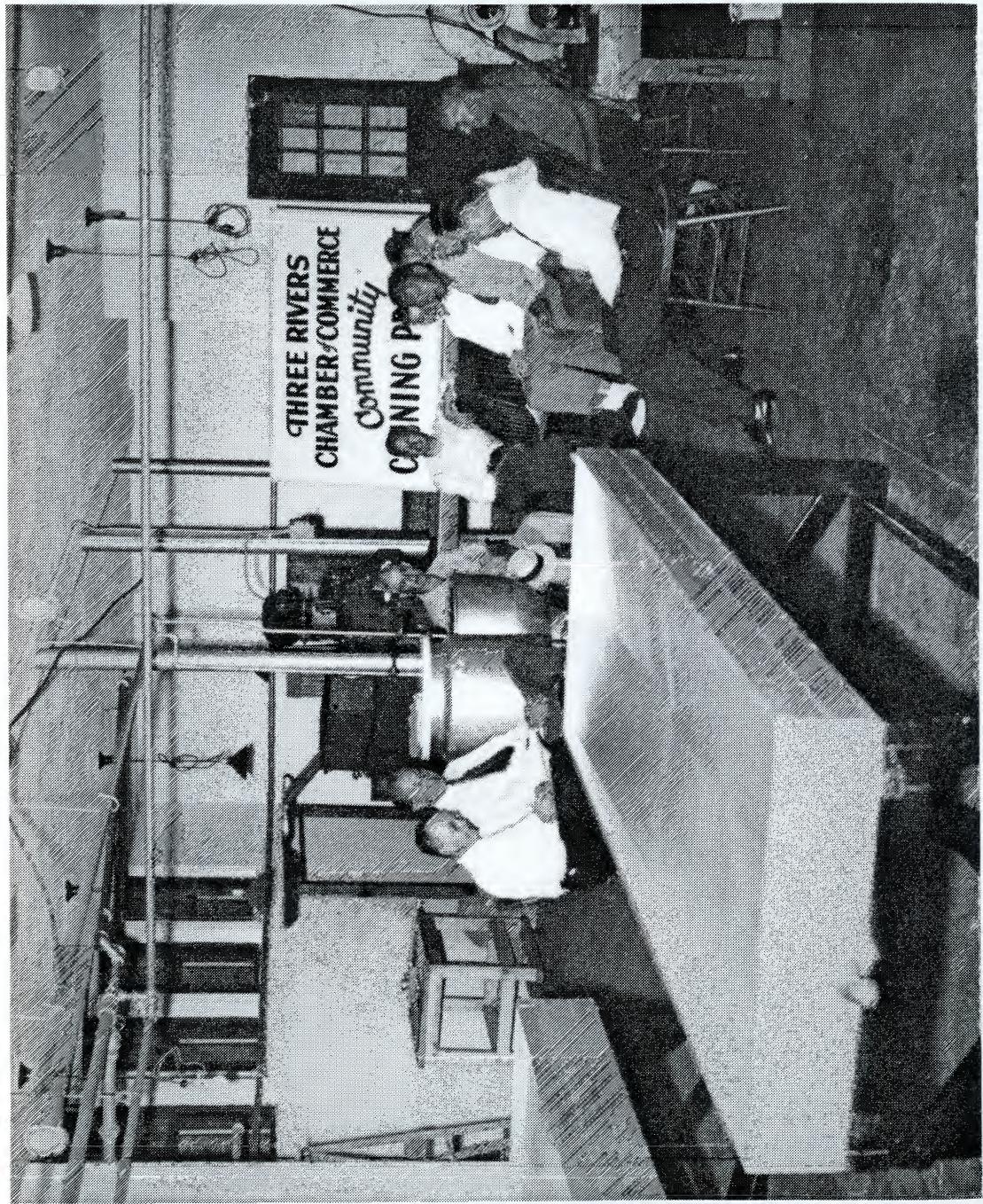
NEW HOUSES ON PALMER ROAD, SOUTH STREET, MAPLE TERR., ANDERSON AVE., SPRINGFIELD ST.

VESTIBULE SCHOOL

Two classes were offered: the first course of one year duration was designed for those who have completed the grammar school courses; the second was of a two year period for those who had graduated from high school. Just how many workers were able to take advantage of these courses is not readily available, however, those who did soon reaped the benefits of learning by receiving promotions and equivalent compensations.

Cooking Class at Pickering Hall ca. 1910





Canning School at Wenonahset sponsored by
Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce ca. 1943

CHAPTER IX

The Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce

Civic pride had always been a part of the village makeup, a trait that was encouraged by the Palmer Mill agents.

Undoubtedly, it was with their encouragement that in 1916 the Three River's Improvement Association was formed. This Association played an important roll in village beautification and civic projects as well as overseeing the activities at Pickering Hall. It is believed that one of their civic projects was the permitting of the Three Rivers Fire Department Engine House to be attached to the back side of Pickering Hall thus providing a more central location for the protection of the village.

THREE RIVERS
IMPROVEMENT
ASSOCIATION

One might surmise that this Association was the forerunner of the first Chamber of Commerce in Three Rivers, for it appears that the present Chamber is actually the third Chamber to have been formed, the first two having defaulted for one reason or another.

The "First" Chamber was organized in 1917 as a "Board of Trade" with F. A. Upham, Otis Mill agent as President. No records have been found to date regarding the activities of this organization, perhaps this being the time of World War I, might have some bearing on this omission. In fact the only reference that this was called a Chamber of Commerce is found in the minutes of the Second Chamber of Commerce, so called,

FIRST CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

and is recorded as follows:

"Meeting April 16, 1923 F. A. Upham, Chairman; P. T. Belanger, Secretary. Unanimous vote that the money held in the name of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce be transferred for the use of the reorganized body. Election: President F. A. Upham, Vice President F. Rogers, Secretary P. Belanger."

SECOND CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

This reorganized Second Chamber of Commerce remained very active for about 10 years. They worked hard in an effort to support and enhance the village life: style. They promoted social and recreational activities such as: commissioning the building of a bandstand on the village common in 1927 so that the Paderewski Band might hold weekly concerts; they sponsored Field Day activities at Ames Beach in Bondsville and supported the efforts of building a skating and tennis court in the village.

NEW INDUSTRIES
COMMITTEE

In 1929 they formed a "New Industries Committee" in an effort to attract other business to the village, and yet, they went on record as to "being opposed to the installation of a gas station at any time in the village". Perhaps they felt that gas stations were detrimental to the lifestyle of the village by promoting undo traffic and noise pollution. Evidently not everyone shared in this opinion for that same year Lewis Marhelewicz built the Three Rivers Garage on Main Street, and became the agent for Chrysler, Plymouth, Durant and G.M.C. trucks.

MARHELEWICZ
GARAGE

The automobile had come to stay in the village and would soon replace all other forms of public transportation. The trolley car, the main source of travel between the villages since its beginning in 1895 was replaced by the autobus in 1935. The Rabbit Train, a popular choice for those who wished to spend the day in Springfield, had succumbed the year before due to the state's mandated Quabbin Reservoir Project. The last public transportation outlet to leave the village due to the pressures of the automobile would be the Central Vermont Railroad passenger service, which in 1937, would make its final run stopping at the Main Street depot as a farewell gesture between old friends.

TROLLEY CAR

In spite of all the modern transportation facilities and the amenities that came with it, the villagers remained tolerant of those who preferred to continue the old ways. Therefore, it was still a common sight, come early summer, to see Mr. Motyka who lived on Three Rivers Road, driving his cattle down the Main Street to Bourne Street and onto the summer pasture lands along the river's edge.

CATTLE DRIVE

The 1929 Stock Market crash was a devastating blow to this nation as a whole and to Three Rivers village in particular, for the Great Depression that followed would change the course of the Industrial Revolution that had begun just over a hundred years before. Supply and demand, the catalyst that governs the business world, was thrown almost immediately into a downward spiral and, like a flood water, swept away the foundation of industry as well as business. For three years the

STOCK MARKET CRASH 1929

Otis Company tried to reverse the downward drift but increasing competition and diminishing profits dictated the course that was to follow.

SALE OF HOUSES

One of the first moves the company made in an attempt to regain some of its capital was to liquidate many of its real estate holdings. On November 29, 1933, a public auction was held and 76 company houses and 5 parcels of company land was sold, yielding a total of \$74,875. This sale began at 10:00 a.m. and lasted until dark, with most of the mill employees being present, the company having dismissed them from work early so that they might attend. As the bidding began, a circus-like feeling of anticipation was experienced by both the bargain hunter and curiosity seeker alike. This feeling remained throughout the day and many of the nearly 500 villagers who gathered that morning remained, moving from site to site as the day wore on. The last and apparently the liveliest bidding took place at the "Recreation Park" on Belchertown Road. This 6-1/3 acre ballfield was the subject of a three-way contest between the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce, the Franco-American Club and St. Stanislaus Polish Society, each desiring to continue a recreational program on the property.

PULASKI PARK

The final bid of \$2,375 was made by the Polish Society and with it a new chapter in the history of Three Rivers began. This park became the home of the Y.M.P.A. (Young Men's Polish Association) semi-pro; pee wee and midget baseball teams as well as the recreational area for all three grammar schools in the village: St. Peter and Paul's; St. Anne's and Three Rivers (public).

In 1957 a picnic shelter was built and the park was renamed "Pulaski Park" a name that would later gain fame as the Polka dancing capital of New England.

The closing of the Palmer Mill in 1936 was a major catastrophe to the village as it was to the town as a whole. But this was only the beginning for in less than a decade the mill in Thorndike and the mill in Bondsville would also close leaving the town in a very depressed state.

January 5, 1937, a meeting was called by the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce for the purpose of reorganization. The Chamber, which had been more or less inactive for sometime, was now anxious to assume a roll of active cooperation with the new owners of the Palmer Mill property in an effort to reopen the plant as one unit or as several manufacturing units.

The new owners Bruce Wetmore and Bernard Goldfine were experienced manufacturers who owned several mills in New England and were now taking over the Bondsville mill as well as the Three Rivers mill properties.

The first steps taken by the Chamber after its reorganization was to appoint a committee for "New Industry" whose duties would include that of fund raising. In the beginning the fund raising events were mainly sponsored motion picture shows at the Idle Hour Theater and carnivals. However, before the year was out the Chamber began sponsoring Beano games which were held in the weave shed of the former Palmer Mill. These beano games proved to be such successful money makers

NEW OWNERS OF
PALMER MILL
PROPERTY

NEW INDUSTRY
COMMITTEE

BEANO GAMES

PALMER
INDUSTRIES
INC.

that on December 4, 1942, only four years after they began, the Chamber voted to discontinue their sponsorship because, "they had reached their objectives for the industry program and the village improvements."

The year following the reorganization of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce (1938), a small group of businessmen in Depot Village joined together to form the "Palmer Industries, Inc." The goals of this new organization paralleled those of the Three Rivers Chamber but were laid out on a much broader scale. The fund raising method chosen by Palmer Industries was that of selling stock at \$5.00 a share of which the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce, in 1939, bought 30 shares thereby adding further support to this project.

The following was recorded in the February 9, 1943 Treasurer's Report of the Three Rivers Chamber:

Stock in Palmer Industries prior to Beano	\$ 150
Stock in Palmer Industries with Beano earnings	11,500
Third Mortgage on mill (Tampax) with Beano earnings	10,000
Donated to Thorndike River project from Beano earnings	7,000

The \$7,000 donation had been given as "an "industrial assistance" to Self-Locking Carton Company for the reconstruction of a Ware River dike necessary to the plant's operation. The previous dike having been washed away during the 1938 hurricane/flood.

THREE RIVERS
CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE, INC.

As the Chamber became more and more involved in industrial pursuits, its membership showed a significant increase. With the expanded membership and increase in capital earnings the

idea of becoming incorporated was actively pursued and on June 18, 1940, the "Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce Inc.", became official.

This therefore is the Chamber of Commerce that we identify with today and, for whom we are celebrating its "50th Anniversary." The official purpose of this organization as stated in their bylaws is as follows:

"To establish a body of recognized authority to deal with matters of interest to the businessmen of Three Rivers and to the general public; to forward the prosperity of the community; and to promote the general welfare of the village."

This Chamber has certainly lived up to its purpose in the past and continues to do so today.

Historically it was through this Chamber's efforts that both Tampax Corp. and Cleveland Container came to Three Rivers in March of 1942 and set up their manufacturing plant in the sawtooth weave shed of the former Palmer Mill.

The Three Rivers Chamber arranged for a \$10,000 mortgage so that the Tampax Corp. could purchase the building for the sum of \$12,000. Tampax then rented out space in this building to the Cleveland Container Co. for their manufacturing operation.

The financial arrangement between the Three Rivers Chamber and Tampax proved to benefit both parties over the years. In 1953 Tampax Corp. paid off its mortgage in full, the Three Rivers Chamber then reinvested its interests in this new

TAMPAX
MORTGAGE

THREE RIVERS
CHAMBER
BOUGHT STOCK

company by buying 400 shares of its stock, a move that proved profitable for both the Chamber and Tampax alike.

Later that same year (1942), two additional manufacturing companies would occupy other parts of the former Palmer Mill Complex.

WHITE AIRCRAFT

The first was White Aircraft, who bought the large 5 story building on the southside of the Chicopee River directly behind the weave shed. White Aircraft was mainly a cutting and spot welding shop that during World War II, assembled metal tubing into frames for glider aircraft. After the war, carpet sweepers and wire display racks were its byproducts. About 1950 White Aircraft leased a portion of its building to a division of U. S. Plywood Corp., who manufactured honey cone panel for aircraft and fiberglass dome covers for radar. This U. S. Plywood Company stayed in Three Rivers approximately three years before moving back to Connecticut.

ZERO MFG. CO.

In 1959 White Aircraft merged with a California based company and became the Zero Manufacturing Company, White Division Inc. who now specialized in aluminum sheet metal products.

After setting up its operations in Three Rivers, the Zero Manufacturing Co. began a program of expansion that within a few short years would tax the operational capacity of the existing facilities. Therefore in 1962 the Zero Manufacturing Co. moved its operations into much larger quarters in the neighboring town of Monson. The 5 story building was then resold and became a part of the expanding Tampax Corp.

The last of the old Palmer Mill buildings to be occupied was the former Boiler Steam Plant which is located on the north bank of the Chicopee River behind the 5 story building. This facility was sold to Frank Falk and John Duda in 1943 and became the F. & D. Machine Shop specializing in grinding tools for industry.

F. & D. TOOL

The years between 1943 and 1945, the war years so called, (World War II), became a time of evolution for social as well as economic changes. Many of our young men had been called into the service thus leaving a serious labor shortage for all the industries in the Town of Palmer. In an effort to correct this deficit, the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce co-sponsored with the Palmer Industries of Depot Village an "Aid to Industry" program. The program involved the setting up of a public relations showroom at 399 Main Street in Depot Village for the purpose of familiarizing potential employees with the types of work available. The industries involved in this promotion were: A. B. & J. Rathbone; Cleveland Container; F. & D. Machine Tool Works; Hinkson Paper Co.; Jarvis and Jarvis; SCS Box Co.; Swift & co.; Tampax Inc. and White Aircraft Co. This program was particularly designed to attract women into the workforce and offered an hourly wage of 25¢. Many women accepted this challenge of industry thus began another lifestyle change in the community.

AID TO
INDUSTRY

In 1943 the Three Rivers Chamber bought the former Post Office lot on Main Street, this lot having been vacant since

POST OFFICE LOT

since the post office building was swept away during the 1938 hurricane/flood. In purchasing this land the Chamber hoped to promote further business ventures for the village. Their mission was accomplished for the following year the lot was sold to Raymond Niles who then erected a one story business block on the site. The business tenure of this block has changed several time since the original tenant occupants and today the second and present owner, Frederick Tenczar, occupies one half of the building with Tenczar's Superette and leases the other half to Hair Expressions.

DUMP LOT

As the same time that the Three Rivers Chamber purchased the post office lot they also acquired the "dump lot" so called. This is a 2-1/2 acre plot of land located on the north side of the Chicopee River, east of Bridge Street between the river and North Street. In 1950 the "dump land" so called, was conveyed by the Chamber to Stephen J. Bergeson for a nominal consideration with the understanding that he was to erect a building of not less than \$10,000 value for the manufacturing of plastic products. If he failed to do so the land was to revert back to the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Bergeson complied to the agreement by erecting the Hampden Manufacturing Company building and in 1964 the Chamber sold him the land with no strings attached.

As the decades progressed, it became apparent that the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce was taking on the Godfather-like roll that once had been the province of the large textile mills. Their wheeling and dealing, so to speak, was all

slanted toward community improvements in both the workplace and municipal perks.

Projects such as: the acquisition of the lot on LaRiviere Street in 1948 and the Shaw property on Main Street in 1976, were both for the purpose of expanding public parking space;

PARKING LOTS

the building of a bus waiting station on the corner of Bridge and Springfield Streets in 1949 for the convenience of the public. This station was razed in 1965, its usefulness having waned with the increase in auto travel;

WAITING STATION

the involvement both physically and financially in the setting up of the Nativity on the Common each Christmas season since 1950;

NATIVITY

the purchase of land off Calkins Road in 1961 as a site for a potential industrial park. In 1968 this potential seemed to have been realized when Suburban Plastics became their first tenant. Unfortunately they would be the only tenant and so in 1973 the Chamber voted to transfer the remaining land to W. J Hasting Co., owner of Suburban Plastics.

INDUSTRIAL PARK

In addition to supporting business and industry the Chamber also sponsored many civic organizations from scouting to sports teams to camping programs, also their interest and support to matters of safety and beautification for this village is well known; street lights, stop signs, flowers, shrubs, trees and once again a bandstand gazebo for the Common. I say, once again, because this will be the third gazebo for the village, the first having been erected by the Palmer Mill in 1883 and stood on the left side of the Common.

THE CHAMBER'S OUTREACH

THE FIRST GAZEBO

This was a period of band concert appreciation which lasted more than two decades before waning. Not only did the Palmer Mill erect a gazebo but so did the Thorndike Mill as well. Whereas the "Common" served as the appropriate site for the Village of Three Rivers, the east side of the grammar school was chosen for the Village of Thorndike.

It is believed that the Columbian Band, so-called of Thorndike Village was the main attraction for both of these concert sites for there was a strong common bond between the mill personnel during this period. However, in time change eventually comes. In the case of Three Rivers, Pickering Hall was the reason because it changed the recreational focus of the village from passive to a more active participation and in so doing literally abandoned the gazebo.

About 1913, the mill agent, Mr. Upham had the gazebo removed and reset upon the back side of his home lot near Baptist Hill Road and the Common would remain empty for another decade or more. The Upham lot is now Raymond Chudy's homesite.

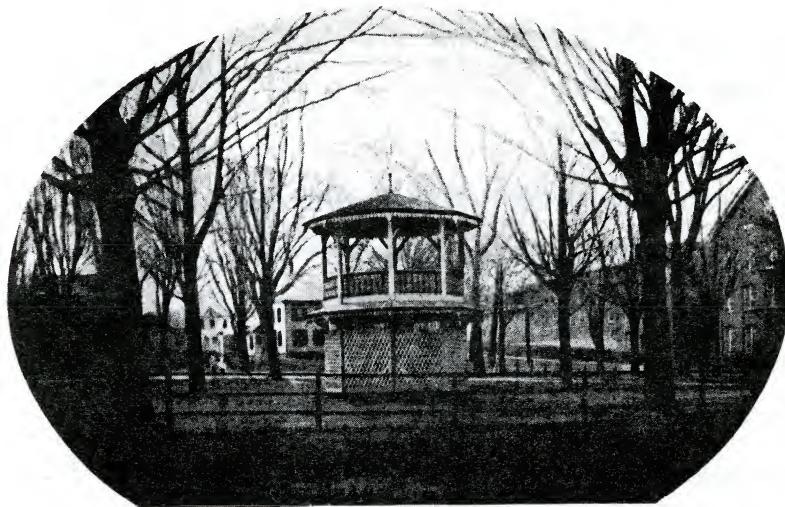
Second Gazebo

The second gazebo was erected in 1927 by the former Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce and was placed in the center of the Common. This gazebo was built for the convenience of the Paderewski Band of Three Rivers, who gave weekly concerts in season for the enjoyment of the public.

Unfortunately, because of the Depression and the closing of the mill, the gazebo was allowed to fall into disrepair and the Paderewski Band gradually disbanded and the gazebo was torn down ca 1942.

The third and present gazebo occupies the site of the original (1883) and will hopefully be host to many enjoyable concerts in years to come.

Third Gazebo



BAND STAND AND COMMON, THREE RIVERS, MASS.

2076-PUBLISHED BY SUSIE F. TWISS.

*Eliza F. Twiss
Three Rivers, Mass.
Susie F. Twiss*

CHAPTER X
MODERN TIMES

Floods have always been the nemesis for towns that have settled along the river banks and traditionally the spring thaws have been the most vulnerable time for destruction. There are many here in the village who can recall the 1936 flood and the devastation it caused.

FLOODS &
HURRICANES

In recent years, however, weather patterns have changed and hurricanes have become equally as threatening to this area. This village has been subjected to two of them in the past 50 odd years; the first in 1938, the other 1955.

It was a common sight to witness boats patrolling the Main Street for the water had risen nearly to the former Baptist Church. Properties located on Belanger Avenue and lower Bourne Streets were inundated almost to the second floor level and in 1955, the Tampax building was like a water works that spewed water and furniture out of its lower windows in an effort to rid itself of the tenacious flood water. In 1960 the town fathers petitioned the Federal government asking for help in building a control that would reduce the damage caused by any future natural phenomenon.

The Three Rivers Flood Control Project, the response to the petition, began in 1964 and before it was completed the Quaboag River course was changed, making it follow a wider and more curvaceous course so as to moderate its flow. The channel leading up to and beyond the Main Street bridge was

FLOOD CONTROL
PROJECT

widened and deepened thereby increasing its holding capacity tenfold. The land on the north side of Main Street between the Central Vermont railroad tracks and the river on which the fire station had stood, was all but eliminated with the widening of this channel thus necessitating the search of a new site for the station. As the saying goes - what goes around, comes around, for the site chosen was that of the former District School on Springfield Street, west of the Tampax Complex. Where once the school and fire station had shared a common site, concurrently (at Bridge and Springfield Streets), they now would, share a common site in succession, when in 1965. the new and present Three rivers Fire Station was built.

POST OFFICE

1965 was another transitional year for the village outlook. In addition to the Flood Control Project and the new fire station, a branch office of the Third National Bank was opened on Main Street next to Horgan's Drug Store and the new government owned post office building erected on Bridge Street. Except for the small wooden building ca. 1920 that was built on the north side of Main Street at the junction of the three rivers, this was the first permanent post office for the village. Previously the post office was set in as a part of a general store and was moved from place to place every few years. The Otis Company building was the first attempt to provide an exclusive place for the post office but in 1938 this building was swept away with the hurricane/flood

and, once again, the post office became commingled with commercial enterprise. However on April 1, 1965, together with the able assistance of the Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce, the new and present post office was dedicated and Postmistress Anna Rusek resumed her usual duties.

There were several other changes and rumors of changes in the village landscape profile during this decade and the decades that followed, they varied in their concept from utilitarian to recreational, from educational to convenience and all would leave their mark on the life style of the village. Beginning in 1960 when one of the three large brick tenement blocks on Springfield Street, the one nearest the corner of Bridge Street, was razed to make room for a planned future gas station;

the development of the Hemlock Hill Ski Area, west of the business center on Springfield Street, which began its operation during the winter of 1964. This fine recreational area offered downhill skiing, ski instruction and ice skating facilities and remained a popular site for well over a dozen years or more. However, as weather patterns changed and snow became in short supply for two to three years in succession, the owners, who were feeling a great financial burden, made the inevitable decision to close down this recreation area at the end of the winter season of 1978;

1971 was the year that two great plans were presented before the Town, one was the Pathfinder Regional Vocational-

RAZED BRICK
TENEMENT ON
SPRINGFIELD ST.

HEMLOCK HILL
SKI AREA

PATHFINDER
HIGH SCHOOL

RED BRIDGE
STATE PARK

Technical High School to be built on a 52 acre parcel near Four Corners, and the other, Red Bridge State Park recreational facility that would include both the Three Rivers and Ludlow watershed areas of the Chicopee River. Historically only the Pathfinder Regional High School became a reality (1972) while the Red Bridge project succumbed to financial woes;

WATER
POLLUTION
CONTROL
PROGRAM

the last major transformation in the landscape began in 1977 and involved the implementation of the Water Pollution Control Program and the installation of the Wastewater Treatment Plant adjacent to the Ware River off North Street.

The installation of this facility has begun a program that will someday restore the river waters of the town and especially those that pass through this village, back to the pristine quality enjoyed by the first settlers here.

The village of Three Rivers has come a long way from its humble beginning in 1826, and hopefully it will continue withs its positive and progressive attitudes in all the days to come.

N.B.

There is difficulty in trying to include all the events pertinent to any history, for inevitably something near and dear is left unsaid. If such is the case with this history, forgive me, and inform me, so that it can be recorded elswhere as a part of our Town's history.

Jane E. Golas

1990



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Jane E. (Woodcock) Golas born in Springfield, Mass.; graduated from the Springfield School system; attended American International College and graduated from Springfield Hospital School of Nursing receiving the degree of Registered Nurse.

Married Frank P. Golas, a native son of the Village of Three Rivers and has three grown sons. In 1949 she became a Palmer resident and has adopted this town as her home ever since.

She has been involved in many civic and social activities over the years and has served as an officer on several of their boards. At present she is chairperson of the Historical Commission, Secretary on the Conservation Commission, member of the Groundwater Protection Commission, policy advisory representative for the Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission, member of Local Housing Partnership, chairperson of the Board of Trustees at the Second Congregational Church of Palmer and Church Librarian.

It was as Church Librarian that she became interested in local history and has pursued this interest ever since. To date she has written several short one subject local histories, however, "A Chronicle of the Village of Three Rivers" is the first multi-subject history which encompasses an entire village through its many diverse periods of growth from its pre-conceivement into the modern age.